

# A Linguistic Study of Relativization in English and Arabic Letters to the Editor

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## ABSTRACT

This study is a contrastive linguistic analysis that investigates the use and functions of relativization particularly restrictive relative clauses (RRCs) and non-restrictive relative clauses (NRRCs) in English and Arabic letters to the editor. The study aims to identify the types, frequencies, and communicative functions of RRCs and NRRCs in both languages. It also aims to examine their syntactic structures and communicative functions across both languages. It further aims to investigate the similarities and differences in the distributional patterns and functional preferences of relativization between English and Arabic. Additionally, the study aims to investigate how writers strategically use relativization to enhance persuasion, elaboration, and rhetorical impact in their letters

The research is guided by the following hypotheses: (1) Relativization serves as a fundamental syntactic and pragmatic tool in both English and Arabic letters to the editor. (2) RRCs are more frequent than NRRCs across both datasets due to their defining and clarifying roles. (3) English RRCs tend to serve descriptive elaborative functions, whereas Arabic RRCs predominantly fulfill grounding purposes. (4) NRRCs are chiefly used for expansion in both languages, with Arabic showing a higher frequency of evaluative NRRCs. (5) There are notable cross-linguistic differences in the patterns and functions of relativization due to structural and rhetorical norms in each language.

To test these hypotheses, the study applies a dual-layered analytical framework: RRCs are analyzed according to the functional classifications proposed by Givón (1993, 1995), Fox (1987), and Fox & Thompson (1990), while NRRCs are examined using Tao and McCarthy's (2001) model of Expansion, Evaluative, and Affirmation functions. The data for the study consist from letters to the editor were randomly selected from credible journalistic sources, established newspapers and magazines in both English and Arabic, ensuring a representative and contextually rich dataset.

Findings indicate that RRCs are used more extensively than NRRCs in both English and Arabic, with Arabic exhibiting a greater overall frequency of RCs. English RRCs strongly favor descriptive functions, while Arabic RRCs emphasize grounding, particularly. For NRRCs, the expansion function is dominant in both English and Arabic. However, Arabic NRRCs include a higher percentage of evaluative functions than English. Affirmative NRRCs are rare in both corpora.

These results support all five hypotheses and confirm that, while English and Arabic share overlapping strategies in using RCs for elaboration and discourse cohesion, they differ significantly in functional distribution and rhetorical style. English leans toward forward-moving argumentation via elaborative RRCs and NRRCs, while Arabic prioritizes referential clarity, evaluative embedding, and syntactic density.

**Keywords:** *Contrastive Linguistics; Relativization; Restrictive Relative Clauses (RRCs); Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses (NRRCs)*

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## الملخص

تُعد هذه الدراسة تحلياً لُغَ أوباً تقاً ابلبا يستقصي استخدام ووظائف عملية التحديد النحوي (التضييق) أو التوصيف عبر الجمل الوصلية، وخصوصاً اصلاً الجمل الوصلية التقييدية (RRCs) والجمل الوصلية غير التقييدية (NRRCs) في رسائل القراء الموجهة إلى الصحف باللغة الإنجليزية والعربية. وتهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد أنواع وتكرارات ووظائف هذه الجمل في كلتا اللغتين، كما تسعى إلى تحليل بنيتها التركيبية ووظائفها التواصلية، بالإضافة إلى استكشاف أوجه التشابه والاختلاف في أنماط توزيعها وتفضيلها الوظيفية بين اللغتين. وتهدف أيضاً إلى الكشف عن كيفية استخدام الكتاب لأساليب التحديد النحوي بشكل استراتيجي لتعزيز الإقناع، والتفصيل، والأثر البلاغي في رسائلهم.

ترتكز الدراسة على الفرضيات التالية:

1. تُعد الجمل الوصلية أداة نحوية وبراغماتية أساسية في رسائل القراء باللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية.
2. الجمل التقييدية (RRCs) أكثر شيوعاً من الجمل غير التقييدية (NRRCs) في كل المجموعتين النصيتين بسبب دورها التوضيحي والتعريف.
3. تميل الجمل التقييدية في الإنجليزية إلى أداء وظائف وصفية وتفصيلية، بينما تؤدي الجمل التقييدية في العربية غالباً دور الترسية أو التثبيت المرجعي.
4. تُستخدم الجمل غير التقييدية بشكل رئيسي لتوسيع المعنى في كلتا اللغتين، مع ميل العربية لاستخدامها بشكل أكثر في التقييم.
5. توجد فروق لغوية ملحوظة في أنماط ووظائف الجمل الوصلية، نتيجة للتحولات في البنى النحوية والمعايير البلاغية في كل لغة.

لاختبار هذه الفرضيات، تعتمد الدراسة على إطار تحليلي مزدوج: تحلل الجمل التقييدية وفقاً للتصنيفات الوظيفية التي قدمها (Givón (1993, 1995)، وFox (1987)، وFox & Thompson (1990)، بينما تُدرس الجمل غير التقييدية استناداً إلى نموذج Tao و McCarthy (2001) الذي يقسمها إلى ثلاث وظائف: التوسيع، التقييم، والتوكيد.

وقد تم اختيار بيانات الدراسة عشوائياً من رسائل القراء المنشورة في مصادر صحفية موثوقة، تشمل صحفاً ومجلاتاً راسخة باللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية، لضمان تمثيل شامل وغني بالسياقات.

تشير النتائج إلى أن الجمل التقييدية تُستخدم بشكل أوسع من الجمل غير التقييدية في كلتا اللغتين، وأن اللغة العربية تُظهر معد الأعلى من حيث عدد الجمل الوصلية. تميل الجمل التقييدية في الإنجليزية إلى أداء الوظائف الوصفية، في حين تركز نظيراتها في العربية على وظيفة الترسية المرجعية. وبالنسبة للجمل غير التقييدية، فإن وظيفة التوسيع هي السائدة في اللغتين، بينما تسجل العربية نسبة أعلى من الوظائف التقييمية مقارنة بالإنجليزية. أما وظيفة التوكيد، فهي نادرة في كل المجموعتين.

تدعم هذه النتائج الفرضيات الخمس جميعها، وتؤكد أن اللغة الإنجليزية والعربية تشتركان في استخدام استراتيجيات مشابهة للتوسيع وربط الخطاب، إلا أنهما تختلفان بشكل ملحوظ في التوزيع الوظيفي وأسلوب البلاغية. فالإنجليزية تميل إلى بناء الحجج عبر الجمل الوصفية الموسعة، بينما تركز العربية على الدقة المرجعية، والتقييم الضمني، والكثافة التركيبية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** اللغويات التقابلية، التحديد النحوي، الجمل الوصلية التقييدية (RRCs)، الجمل الوصلية غير التقييدية

(NRRCs)

## The Problem

Although relativization is one of the most powerful syntactic and pragmatic mechanisms for organizing discourse and achieving communicative clarity, it has received limited attention in contrastive studies involving letters to the editor in English and Arabic. Existing research has predominantly addressed relativization from syntactic perspectives or in literary contexts, often overlooking its pragmatic and rhetorical roles in opinion-based journalistic writing.

Specifically, the ways in which restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses function to convey argumentation, reinforce persuasion, and structure reader-writer interaction within the genre of letters to the editor remain

underexplored— especially in Arabic. This creates a significant gap in contrastive discourse analysis that examines not just structure, but function and stylistic impact across languages.

Given the increasing importance of media and public opinion discourse, and the role of letters to the editor as a site of reader expression and argumentation, this study aims to fill that gap. It focuses on how English and Arabic writers strategically deploy RRCs and NRRCs to fulfill specific communicative, rhetorical, and discursive goals.

### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the types and frequencies of relative clauses (RRCs and NRRCs) used in English and Arabic letters to the editor?
2. How do RRCs and NRRCs function syntactically and communicatively in English and Arabic letters to the editor?
3. What similarities and differences exist between English and Arabic in the functional distribution of RRCs and NRRCs?
4. To what extent do English and Arabic writers employ relativization to achieve rhetorical, persuasive, and discourse-organizing functions?

### **The Aims**

This study seeks to:

1. Identify and classify the types and frequency of restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses in English and Arabic letters to the editor.
2. Analyze the syntactic behavior and pragmatic functions of RRCs and NRRCs in each language.
3. Compare the distributional patterns and functional preferences of relativization across the two languages.
4. Investigate how writers in both English and Arabic use relativization as a strategy to enhance clarity, build argumentation, and achieve persuasive effects in editorial discourse.

### **The Hypotheses**

The study proposes the following hypotheses:

1. Relativization is a central grammatical and rhetorical strategy in both English and Arabic letters to the editor.
2. RRCs are more frequent than NRRCs in both corpora due to their primary function of defining and clarifying referents.
3. Functional distribution patterns of RRCs and NRRCs differ significantly between Arabic and English, reflecting cross-linguistic variations in discourse organization.
4. NRRCs are employed more frequently for evaluative and persuasive functions in English letters than in Arabic, reflecting stylistic and rhetorical differences in editorial conventions.
5. There are notable cross-linguistic variations in the patterns and functional distribution of relativization between English and Arabic, due to the structural and stylistic norms of each language.

### **The Procedures**

1. Conducting a comprehensive review of literature related to relativization, relative clauses (RCs), and their syntactic and functional roles in English and Arabic.
2. Employing an eclectic analytical framework combining the models of Givón (1993, 1995), Fox (1987), and Fox & Thompson (1990) for analyzing Restrictive Relative Clauses (RRCs), supplemented by Tao and McCarthy's (2001) model for Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses (NRRCs).
3. Compiling a representative corpus of English and Arabic letters to the editor sourced from reputable newspapers and journals.
4. Carrying out both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data using the selected models.
5. Interpreting the results, drawing conclusions based on the analysis, and offering suggestions for future research.

### **The Limits**

This study is limited to:

1. Analyzing relative clauses in a selected corpus of English and Arabic letters to the editor from journalistic sources.
2. Examining the syntactic and functional roles of RRCs and NRRCs through the theoretical lenses of Givón (1993, 1995), Fox (1987), Fox and Thompson (1990), and Tao & McCarthy (2001).
3. Focusing exclusively on written, contemporary journalistic discourse, with no inclusion of literary or spoken texts.
4. Adhering to the American Psychological Association (APA), 7th Edition (2020) for citation and referencing.

### **The Significance**

This study offers valuable insights for discourse analysts, linguists, and translators involved in cross-linguistic research between English and Arabic. By examining the use of RCs in argumentative writing, it sheds light on the rhetorical and syntactic strategies employed by writers in both languages. Additionally, it holds practical value for students, educators, and curriculum designers by enhancing understanding of relativization in journalistic writing and supporting the development of contrastive linguistic competence.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **The Concept of Contrastive Analysis**

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is a branch of linguistics that involves comparing two or more languages or their subsystems to highlight both their similarities and differences (Fisiak, 1981). It can be approached from either a theoretical or applied perspective. Theoretical contrastive studies, as outlined by Fisiak, aim to systematically explore the distinctions and commonalities between languages by focusing on universal semantic and syntactic categories, constructing frameworks for comparison, and identifying comparable linguistic features.

Johansson (2008) defines CA as the systematic comparison of languages to reveal structural and functional similarities and differences. It is particularly valuable in the context of language learning, where recognizing these contrasts can enhance the understanding of grammatical systems and support the acquisition of a second language. According to Shaghi (2014), CA helps learners recognize the structural contrasts between their first and second languages, thereby anticipating potential learning challenges.

Historically used to trace linguistic lineages, CA has evolved into a practical tool in language teaching. Often referred to as comparative or contrastive linguistics, it examines linguistic components such as vocabulary, grammar, phonology, and syntax, aiming to predict areas of difficulty for second language learners (Davies, 2007).

James (1980) describes CA as a comparative linguistic endeavor designed to produce dual-language typologies. He stresses that CA is inherently comparative and involves two key steps: first, a detailed description of each language, and second, a systematic comparison of those descriptions. He also highlights two principles central to the process: comparisons must be made in a sequential order description preceding comparison and the same linguistic aspects must be analyzed across the languages involved.

### Relativization in English

This section deals with the definition of English relative clauses, restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses, embedding and its types, relative pronouns, and the functions and position of relative clauses. Generally, clauses that function inside the noun phrase as modifiers are called relative clauses (RCs), i.e. relative clauses are typically found as a part of a noun phrase and provide some information about the person or thing indicated by the head of a noun phrase (Park, 2000, P. 4; Yule, 2000, P. 240). 48 According to Crystal (2003), "The most complex kind of postmodification in the noun phrase is a finite clause ... introduced by the set of pronouns who(m), whose, which, that, or 'zero'. These are the relative pronouns... and the clause they introduce is known as a relative clause." He (ibid: 151) adds that "Relative clauses need to be distinguished from a second type of finite clause which can postmodify a noun: the appositive clause". This seems to be very similar to a relative clause introduced by that. Compare these two sentences: (1) The story that she told her brother is not true. (Relative) (2) The story that she killed her brother is not true. (Appositive) The first sentence is relative: „that“ can be replaced by „which“ and the sentence becomes the story which she told her brother is not true. The second is appositive: „that“ cannot be replaced by „which“, and the sentence means the story is that she killed her brother and the story is not true (Govande, 2010). In addition, Hudson (1990) says that "One of the typological characteristics of English is the wide range of 'relativization strategies' that it allows". And as it is well known that complement clauses modify verbs (e.g. as objects; Miller, 2002, P. 64), relative clauses modify nouns. In older descriptions, relative clauses were called adjectival clauses, reflecting the fact that adjectives also modify nouns (Miller, 2002, P. 64). (3) The available money. (4) The money which is available. One feature that distinguishes between adjectives and relative clauses in English is that the former precede nouns while the latter follow them. Reibel and Schane (1969) say that Relativization is the process whereby a sentence is embedded as a modifier in a noun phrase. In this way the relative clause becomes the source of productive instances of both pre- and postmodifiers. Involving as it does the introduction of relative pronouns, the movement of constituent, and various deletions, relativization provides a rich source of insight into other areas of the structure of English.

### Restrictive and Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses

Restrictive Relative Clauses (RRCs) and Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses (NRRCs) serve distinct structural and functional purposes. RRCs are essential to the meaning of the noun they modify, as they specify which entity is being referred to. For instance:

*"My brother who is abroad has sent me a letter"* — this implies the existence of more than one brother.

In contrast, NRRCs add optional, non-essential information that does not affect the noun's identity:

*"My brother—who is abroad—has sent me a letter"* — this suggests there is only one brother, with the added detail being incidental.

As noted by Huddleston (1988), RRCs function as modifiers within noun phrases and are often called *defining relative clauses* because they restrict or identify the referent. These clauses may use "that" instead of relative pronouns (except "whose") or even omit the pronoun when it is not the subject:

*"Those managers who/that sack firemen are saving money."* *"Those managers sacking firemen are saving money."*

NRRCs, on the other hand, are parenthetical in nature, marked off by commas, dashes, or brackets. Dixon (1992) describes them as inserted comments, typically set apart by punctuation or a distinct intonation pattern in speech:

*"My neighbour, who is an English teacher, plays loud music." "The man—whose name is John—likes weekend parties."*

While RRCs are integrated into the sentence meaning, NRRCs merely provide supplementary information. The semantic difference between them can lead to significantly different interpretations:

*"My friend, who is Japanese, is coming."* (NRRC — extra information)

*"My friend who is Japanese is coming."* (RRC — identifies which friend) This distinction is critical for clarity. For example:

*"Snakes which are poisonous should be avoided."* — implies that only some snakes are dangerous.

*"Snakes, which are poisonous, should be avoided."* — wrongly suggests that all snakes are poisonous (Crystal, 2003, p.151).

According to Huddleston (1988), prosody in speech and punctuation in writing help differentiate these two clause types. He emphasizes that NRRCs offer additional, non-integral information, whereas RRCs are tightly bound to the core meaning. For example:

*"The coat which Jack had presented to her was in the safe."* — identifies a specific coat.

*"The coat, which Jack had presented to her, was in the safe."* — adds further information about the coat.

Yule (2000) also observes that NRRCs frequently appear with proper nouns, quantified expressions, or as asides:

*"Mrs. Britos, who is the librarian, reported missing books." "Someone said I took the books, which is untrue."*

*"I never touched the books, most of which were in German."*

Stageberg (1971) further illustrates the contrast with:

*"He walked to the garage which he liked best."* — selects one garage.

*"He walked to the garage, which was a mile away."* — provides additional detail.

He notes that RRCs narrow the reference to a specific subset, while NRRCs contribute optional descriptive content (pp. 250–251).

Hudson (1990) draws a semantic distinction: defining relatives (RRCs) relate to the *sense* of the antecedent, while non-defining relatives (NRRCs) relate to the *referent*. For instance:

*"My wife who lives in Rio"* — implies more than one wife.

*"My wife, who lives in Rio"* — assumes one wife, with added information.

According to Perlmutter and Soames (1997), RRCs and NRRCs differ semantically and structurally, influenced by contextual and interpretive factors.

### Functions of Restrictive Relative Clauses

Restrictive Relative Clauses (RRCs) serve two main discourse functions: grounding and description. Grounding occurs when the information in the RRC helps anchor the head noun to a referent already familiar to the hearer or reader. In contrast, the descriptive function arises when the RRC introduces new information

about the head noun, especially when the referent is newly introduced in discourse (Givón, 1993, 1995; Fox, 1987; Fox & Thompson, 1990).

Givón (1993, 1995) characterizes RRCs as subordinate clauses embedded within noun phrases, serving as tools for referential identification. This means that the speaker assumes the information in the RRC is already known or accessible to the hearer, thus contributing to discourse cohesion.

Fox (1987) and Fox and Thompson (1990) distinguish three subtypes of grounding:

1. Anchoring, where the RRC ties the head noun to an existing discourse entity. For example:

*A: Did they get rid of Kulezink yet?*

*B: No, in fact, I know somebody who has her now.* The relative clause connects "somebody" with "her," previously mentioned.

2. Proposition-linking, where the RRC relies on a conceptual schema or background information introduced earlier:

*The mother's sister is a real bigot... she hates anyone who is not a Catholic.* Here, the RRC "who is not a Catholic" links back to the prior evaluative proposition.

3. Main-clause grounding, where the referent is introduced by the main clause, and the RRC adds descriptive but non-grounding information:

*He has got a spring that comes way up.* The RRC does not establish grounding; instead, the head noun "spring" is introduced and partially described by the main clause itself.

Besides grounding, RRCs can also perform a descriptive function, offering detailed characterizations of newly introduced entities. For instance:

*There is a woman in my class who is a nurse...*

Here, the clause "who is a nurse" is important not for grounding, but for identifying the woman's relevance in the narrative—her "nurseness" justifies her heightened perception of physical disability in the ensuing conversation.

In summary, drawing on Givón (1993, 1995), Fox (1987), and Fox and Thompson (1990), RRCs serve:

- a grounding function when they help link a noun to an established referent or schema,
- and a descriptive function when they introduce new information that enriches or characterizes a novel referent.

### Functions of Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses

Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses (NRRCs), particularly *which*-clauses, have been the focus of discourse-functional analyses in spoken English. Tao and McCarthy (2001), in a corpus-based study of 692 NRRCs from British and American spoken English, identify three primary functional types: expansion, evaluation, and affirmation, with evaluation emerging as the most prevalent.

Unlike RRCs, which contribute to referential specificity, NRRCs typically perform pragmatic rather than semantic functions. They often allow the speaker to express subjective judgments, attitudes, or commentary on the preceding clause. For instance:

*"If you pay yourself, you'll see him within a week" — which I don't really agree with.*

*"They spend £200 on the kids every Christmas — which I think is silly." "I read the whole thing — which is pretty rare."*

These NRRCs do not serve to identify a referent but rather to evaluate or comment on the proposition in the main

clause. The evaluative NRRC, therefore, belongs to the interpersonal function of language, embedding subjective meaning within the grammatical structure.

Tao and McCarthy (2001) also challenge earlier views (e.g., Depraetere, 1996), which claim that NRRCs are mostly in the past tense and primarily serve foregrounding functions. Instead, they found that present tense and evaluative contexts are common. Additionally, NRRCs in spoken discourse are often linked to copular constructions, discourse markers, and epistemic modals, reinforcing their subjective and interactional roles.

Common collocations after *which* include discourse markers such as *you know*, *actually*, *I mean*, *of course*, and *just*, along with modals like *would*, *might*, *could*, and epistemic expressions such as *I think*, *I suppose*, and *seem*. These co-occurrences further illustrate how NRRCs operate as pragmatic resources, allowing speakers to manage stance, express judgment, and maintain conversational coherence.

In conclusion, Tao and McCarthy's (2001) analysis shows that NRRCs—especially those starting with *which*—perform critical discourse functions:

- Evaluation: expressing the speaker's stance or opinion.
- Expansion: elaborating or adding related information.
- Affirmation: confirming or reinforcing prior statements.

Thus, while RRCs serve primarily referential and descriptive purposes, NRRCs contribute significantly to subjectivity, interpersonal engagement, and discourse coherence in spoken communication.

### Relativization in Arabic

In Arabic grammar, relative clauses are traditionally categorized based on the definiteness of the noun they modify. When the noun is indefinite, the modifying clause is referred to as *ṣifa* (صفة), meaning "adjective." If the noun is definite, the clause is known as *ṣila* (صلة), or "adjunct." Despite this distinction, both types are considered relative clauses in modern linguistic terms (Badawi et al., 2004, p. 491).

This section explores the structure and function of relative clauses in Arabic, focusing on relative pronouns, their various forms and uses, and the role of the resumptive pronoun—a distinctive feature of Arabic syntax.

### Restrictive vs. Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses in Arabic

According to Badawi et al. (2004), Arabic does not formally distinguish between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses. The same relative pronoun and syntactic structure can be used in both contexts, as illustrated in the following examples:

□ هَذِهِ هِيَ الْقِصَّةُ الَّتِي كُنْتُ أُبْحَثُ عَنْهَا

*This is the story which I was looking for* (restrictive)

□ نَظَرْتُكَ أَمَامَ الْمَكْتَبَةِ الَّتِي لَمْ تُفْتَحْ بَعْدُ

*I stood waiting for you in front of the library, which had not been opened yet*  
(non-restrictive)

Although Arabic lacks a formal grammatical distinction between RRCs and NRRCs, Dickins (2009) notes that the conjunction *wa* (و)—meaning "and"—can serve as a pragmatic marker of non-restrictiveness when placed before the relative pronoun. This usage helps clarify meaning in complex sentences that contain multiple relative clauses.

An example that demonstrates this functional distinction includes both types:

...الَّذِي أَذَاعَهُ اللَّيْلُ زَيْوُنُ... وَالَّذِي يَنْقُصُ زُرْبَةُ فِيهَا... وَالَّذِي كَتَبَهُ قَمْتَهُ...



Here, the relative clauses offer both essential (restrictive) and additional (non-restrictive) information. The insertion of *wa* before certain clauses signals additional descriptive or appositive content, aligning more closely with how NRRCs are used in English.

## METHODOLOGY

### Data Selection and Description

This study examines a collection of 26 letters to the editor, a genre of formal, public writing typically published in newspapers and magazines. These letters allow individuals to express opinions, respond to articles, and engage with social or political issues, offering a platform for public discourse (Community Tool Box, n.d.).

The dataset comprises 16 English letters and 10 Arabic letters, selected randomly to ensure diversity and representation. Fewer Arabic letters were chosen due to their comparatively longer and more elaborate nature, reflecting the tendency in Arabic writing toward greater verbosity. This aligns with Carl James's (1980) view that contrastive studies aim to highlight structural and stylistic differences between languages.

The letters were sourced from prominent publications across various countries. English letters came from major outlets including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Guardian*. Arabic letters were gathered from widely circulated newspapers such as *Al-Haqqiqah*, *Ammon*, *Al-Rai*, *Al-Dustour*, *Al-Watan (Saudi Arabia)*, *Youm7 (Egypt)*, and *The Guardian (Arabic edition)*.

The selected letters address a broad array of topics—ranging from political and social commentary to discussions on human rights, labor issues, and media freedom. This variety provides a rich foundation for analyzing Relative Clauses (RCs) across different themes and discursive contexts. The dataset includes 26 RCs in the English letters and 54 RCs in the Arabic letters, making it well-suited for a comparative functional analysis of relativization in the two languages.

### The Model Adopted for Data Analysis

This study uses a functional linguistics framework to examine the use of Relative Clauses (RCs) in English and Arabic letters to the editor, recognizing their significance in both argumentation and textual cohesion. Two models are applied: one for Restrictive Relative Clauses (RRCs) and another for Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses (NRRCs). Together, they provide a robust analytical structure for understanding the discourse roles of RCs in editorial writing.

#### 1. Grounding and Descriptive Functions of RRCs

The model used for analyzing RRCs draws on the work of Givón (1993, 1995), Fox (1987), and Fox & Thompson (1990). These scholars focus on how RRCs help in referential clarity and discourse continuity, especially through two key functions: grounding and description.

- Grounding refers to the role of RRCs in linking new or specific information to the broader discourse, helping readers identify referents clearly. For instance, Givón (1995) highlights how RRCs serve as embedded noun modifiers essential for referential identification.
- Description involves providing additional details about the noun, helping to build meaningful representations of discourse participants. Fox (1987) emphasizes that these clauses often offer static descriptions to integrate new entities into the discourse.

Fox and Thompson (1990) further categorize grounding into three types:

- Anchoring: Connecting a noun to a known entity in discourse.
- Proposition-Linking: Linking the clause to a previously introduced idea or schema.
- Description: Adding specific characteristics to help establish relevance in the current context.

## 2. Evaluative, Expansion, and Affirmation Functions of NRRCs

The model for analyzing NRRCs is based on Tao and McCarthy (2001), who explored their use in spoken English. For this study, the model is adapted to suit written editorial texts in both English and Arabic. Unlike RRCs, NRRCs provide non-essential, parenthetical information, often enclosed in commas or introduced by intonation (in speech).

As Dixon (1992) explains, NRRCs resemble inserted comments that don't define the referent but add commentary, evaluation, or clarification.

Tao and McCarthy identify three core functions of NRRCs:

- **Evaluative:** Expresses opinions or stances, often using modal expressions or discourse markers (e.g., "which I believe").
- **Expansion:** Adds related or background information that supports or elaborates on the main clause.
- **Affirmation:** Confirms or reinforces information from the main clause, often showing writer engagement (e.g., "which I did last week").

### Application to Arabic

While traditional Arabic grammar doesn't formally differentiate between restrictive and non-restrictive clauses (Badawi et al., 2004), some linguistic features, such as the use of the conjunction *و* (*wa*), meaning "and", can signal a non-restrictive meaning (Dickins, 2009). For example:

- **Restrictive:** التي هي أسلسا ملية (without "و")
- **Non-Restrictive:** والتي هي أسلسا ملية (with "و")

Thus, even in Arabic, functional differences between RRCs and NRRCs can be observed through structure and context, supporting a contrastive analysis of editorial discourse in both languages.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a comparative analysis of the functions of Restrictive Relative Clauses (RRCs) and Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses (NRRCs) in English and Arabic letters to the editor. Drawing on the functional models of Givón (1993, 1995), Fox (1987), and Fox & Thompson (1990) for RRCs, and Tao and McCarthy (2001) for NRRCs, this dual-layered examination aims to reveal cross-linguistic similarities and differences in how both clause types contribute to the communicative, referential, and rhetorical strategies within the genre.

The results show that while both languages employ relative clauses to organize information, elaborate on referents, and enhance coherence, each exhibits unique tendencies that reflect underlying discourse norms and stylistic preferences.

### Functional Distribution of RRCs Cross-Linguistic Comparison

The comparative distribution of RRC functions across English and Arabic editorial letters reveals clear functional preferences and stylistic tendencies, although both languages share a common communicative goal of clarifying reference and organizing information effectively. The table below summarizes the distribution of RRCs according to Grounding and Description functions:

**Table (2) Cross-Linguistic Comparison of NRRCs**

Function Type	English Data		Arabic Data	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Grounding (Total)	7	38.89%	21	55.26%
- Anchoring	4	22.22%	12	31.58%
-Proposition-Linking	3	16.67%	9	23.68%
Description	11	61.11%	17	44.74%
Total	18	100%	38	100%

The data show that Arabic favors Grounding functions (55.26%) more than English (38.89%), highlighting a tendency in Arabic editorial writing to use RRCs for referential anchoring and discourse linkage. This suggests a rhetorical preference in Arabic for maintaining cohesion through structurally explicit referent-tracking. Specifically, Anchoring RRCs (31.58%) are more frequent than Proposition-Linking RRCs (23.68%), reflecting an emphasis on identifying entities clearly and tying them to prior discourse.

In contrast, English displays a stronger preference for the Descriptive function (61.11%), suggesting that English writers often employ RRCs to elaborate on or qualify the head noun. This function aligns with the genre's tendency to emphasize clarification, specificity, and persuasive elaboration. While English also uses Grounding functions, they are less dominant. Anchoring (22.22%) and Proposition-Linking (16.67%) occur less frequently, consistent with English editorial writing's forward-moving, argument-driven discourse, where introducing new points often takes precedence over constant referent tracking.

Thus, the comparison highlights a functional contrast: English prioritizes elaboration and persuasive qualification, while Arabic emphasizes referential clarity and cohesion. Yet both languages rely on similar sub-functional patterns (anchoring > proposition-linking), suggesting a shared discourse awareness of how to structure restrictive information.

#### Functional Distribution of NRRCs

The distribution of Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses (NRRCs) in both corpora was analyzed using Tao and McCarthy's (2001) classification, which includes the functions of Expansion, Evaluative, and Affirmation. The following table summarizes the results:

**Table (2) Cross-Linguistic Comparison of NRRCs**

Function Type	English Data		Arabic Data	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Expansion	7	77.78%	11	68.75%
Evaluative	2	22.22%	5	31.25%
Affirmation	0	0.00%	1	6.25%
Total	9	100%	16	100%

In both languages, the Expansion function is the most prominent, especially in English (77.78%) and to a slightly lesser extent in Arabic (68.75%). This suggests that writers in both languages predominantly use NRRCs to elaborate on prior content, offer clarifying information, or insert supplementary commentary. This convergence points to a shared use of NRRCs as discourse-expanding tools, allowing authors to refine their points without disrupting the flow of the main clause.

However, a notable divergence appears in the use of Evaluative NRRCs, which are more frequent in Arabic (31.25%) than in English (22.22%). This suggests that Arabic writers are more inclined to embed subjective judgments or attitudes within NRRCs, integrating stance and evaluation into the referential structure. In contrast, English writers may prefer to express evaluation more directly outside the relative clause structure, reflecting a stylistic difference in how commentary is integrated into editorial discourse.

The Affirmation function is the least frequent in both corpora, with no occurrences in English (0%) and only one instance in Arabic (6.25%). This rarity indicates that NRRCs are not typically employed for reinforcing or confirming prior propositions, which aligns with the nature of editorials as argumentative and exploratory rather than confirmatory in tone.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has come up with some significant conclusions that can be propounded as follows:

1. The study confirms hypothesis no.1, as the analysis shows that relativization is a vital syntactic and pragmatic strategy in both English and Arabic letters to the editor. Both languages employ restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses to enhance communicative clarity, organize information, and support argumentative structure, particularly within the opinion-based, persuasive genre of editorial letters.
2. Regarding the use and functions of RRCs, the findings confirm hypotheses no.2 and no.3. RRCs are more frequently used than NRRCs in both English and Arabic datasets, with English showing a strong preference for descriptive functions, while Arabic favors grounding functions, particularly anchoring and proposition-linking. This difference indicates that English writers tend to elaborate and clarify through RRCs, while Arabic writers rely more on RRCs to maintain discourse cohesion and referential precision.
3. As for NRRCs, the analysis supports hypotheses no.4 and no.5. Expansion is the dominant function in both languages, showing that writers use NRRCs to add non-essential yet supportive information. However, evaluative functions are noticeably more common in Arabic than in English, revealing a stronger tendency in Arabic to embed subjective attitudes or judgments within relative clause structures. Affirmation remains rare in both languages, with only one occurrence in Arabic and none in English.
4. The comparative analysis of relativization patterns across both languages highlights both convergence and divergence. While both English and Arabic employ RCs for elaboration and discourse organization, their functional distribution reflects deeper stylistic and rhetorical norms. English editorial writing tends toward descriptive elaboration to develop persuasive arguments, whereas Arabic editorial writing leans more on referential anchoring and embedded evaluation. This confirms hypothesis no.5, demonstrating clear cross-linguistic variations shaped by the communicative conventions of each language.
5. Finally, the overall number of RCs (both RRCs and NRRCs) is higher in Arabic than in English, suggesting a greater syntactic density and a preference for complex clause structures in Arabic letters to the editor. This structural complexity may be tied to cultural and rhetorical traditions in Arabic argumentation, where layered expression and embedded clarification are more prevalent.

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