

RESTRCT: Rhetorical Restriction

From The Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric

 All rhetorical devices > Sentence Construction & Syntactical Stylistics ('ilm al-ma'ānī)

Alphabetical list

Beginning

- Definition
- Linguistic Operations
- Recognition

Communicative Enhancements

Subtypes of Rhetorical Restriction

RESTRCT-IRS: Intrinsic Rhetorical Restriction (*al-qaṣr al-ḥaqīqī*)

RESTRCT-RSR: Relative Rhetorical Restriction (*al-qaṣr al-idāfī*)

RESTRCT-SGR: Singular Rhetorical Restriction (*qaṣr ifrād*)

RESTRCT-INV: Inversion Rhetorical Restriction (*qaṣr qalb*)

RESTRCT-DSG: Designation Rhetorical Restriction (*qaṣr ta'yīn*)

RESTRCT-TPO: Rhetorical Restriction by Relationship Between the Two Poles (*taqṣīm al-qaṣr bi-i'tibār tarafayhi*)

RESTRCT-AQE: Rhetorical Restriction of an Attribute to an Entity (*qaṣr ṣifa 'alā mawṣūf*)

RESTRCT-QAE: Rhetorical Restriction of an Entity to an Attribute (*qaṣr mawṣūf 'alā ṣifa*)

Examples

Different From

Notes

Technical

Historical

See Also

References

Page History

Definition

Rhetorical Restriction (*al-qaṣr*) is an Arabic rhetorical device in which a quality, attribute, or matter are confined to a particular person or thing through a specialised linguistic construction.^{[1][2][3][4][5][6][7]}

Linguistic Operations

From the sources

- Rhetorical Restriction is produced through one of four principal linguistic means (*turuq al-qaṣr*):^{[3][2][7][4][5][6]}
 - Negation and exception** (*al-nafy wa-al-istithnā'*) — a negation particle (*mā, lā, lam, in*, etc.) is followed by an exception particle (*illā*, or *ghayr*).
 - The particle *innamā*** — which simultaneously affirms the predicate for the subject and negates it from others in a single expression.
 - Conjunctive particles** (*al-'aṭf*) — specifically *lā, bal*, and *lākin*. When the conjunction is *lā*, the restricted-to is what precedes it; when it is *bal* or *lākin*, the restricted-to is what follows.
 - Fronting what is due to be delayed** (*taqdīm mā ḥaqquhu al-ta'khīr*) — foregrounding an element that should normally come later in the sentence, whereby the fronted element becomes the restricted-to.
- Every instance of Restriction has two elements (*tarafā al-qaṣr*):^{[2][4][6]}
 - The **restricted** (*al-maqṣūr*) — the element being confined or assigned.
 - The **restricted-to** (*al-maqṣūr 'alayhi*) — the element to which the restricted is exclusively assigned.
- In the negation-and-exception construction, the restricted element appears after the negation particle, and the restricted-to appears after *illā*.^{[2][7][6]}
- With *innamā*, the restricted-to is always placed last (delayed) in the sentence.^{[2][6]}
- The fronting method conveys Restriction not by an explicit particle but by the sound judgment of the reader/listener (*al-dhawq al-salīm*), unlike the other three means which rely on explicit linguistic markers.^{[2][6]}
- Innamā* simultaneously signals affirmation of the restricted-to and negation of what lies beyond it in a single expression, whereas the conjunctive particle method signals these separately (first affirmation, then negation, or vice versa).^[2]
- Restriction may occur between: subject and predicate; verb and agent; agent and object; and circumstantial complement and its governor.^[2]

Recognition

From the sources

Rhetorical Restriction may be present when:

- A negation particle (*mā, lā, lam, in*) is followed by *illā* or *ghayr*.^{[2][7]}
- The sentence opens with *innamā*.^{[2][7][6]}
- A conjunction *lā, bal*, or *lākin* appears after an affirmative or negative statement and explicitly excludes one element in favour of another.^{[2][7]}
- An element that ordinarily follows its governor (predicate, object, circumstantial complement, prepositional phrase) has been fronted.^{[2][7][6]}



القصر

RESTRCT: Rhetorical Restriction

Category

Sentence Construction & Syntactical Stylistics ('ilm al-ma'ānī)

Subcategory

Textual Additions & Omissions

Built upon

7 sources

Annotation Unit

ARDT Code

RESTRCT

Level

1 (Rhetorical device)

↳ Has 3 subtypes

↳ Has 5 sub-subtypes

Included in Taxonomy

ARDT

v0.1.1
v0.1.0

External Identifiers

BALAGHAScore

RSTRCT

BalaghaBase

Q261

OpenAlex

W4415329813

Applications

BalaghaCorpus

See examples

Cite this page

Live DOI

10.64393/balagha.Q261

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Encyclopedic Interpretation

The following diagnostic tool may aid identification:

- If removing the restricting particle or restoring ordinary word order causes the sense of exclusivity to disappear, Restriction may be present.

Communicative Enhancements

From the sources

- **Specification** (*takhsīs*) — Restriction specifies and confines an attribute or entity to a particular locus, excluding all other candidates.^{[1][7]}
- **Affirmation and strengthening** — Restriction strengthens and confirms the meaning in the mind of the [addressee](#), and increases the impact of the statement.^{[2][4][6]}
- **Succinctness** — Restriction condenses into a single statement what would otherwise require two separate propositions (affirmation of one element and negation of another).^[1]
- **Drawing the addressee's attention** to a known fact, compelling renewed notice of it rather than simply stating it.^[1]
- **Indirect suggestion or insinuation** (*ta'riḍ*) — Restriction through *innamā* may convey an indirect meaning opposite in implication to the surface structure, functioning as indirect reproach or innuendo (*ta'riḍ*).^{[1][2][6]}
- **Hyperbole** — Restriction may be employed for exaggeration or heightened emphasis (*mubālagha*).^[2]
- **Correction of mistaken assumptions** — Restriction may be used to reject competing assumptions or confine interpretation to a single intended meaning.^[1]

Applying the Recognition Framework

The information on this page can be used to evaluate whether this device is present in a candidate [lexical item](#) using the [Specific Device Recognition](#) part of the [Universal Framework for Identifying Arabic Rhetorical Devices](#):

- Use the Definition, Mechanism, and Recognition sections of this page in [Step 1](#).
- Apply the substitution test in [Step 2](#).
- Consider contextual indicators in [Step 3](#).
- Use the Diagnostic Communicative Enhancements section of this page in [Step 4](#).

Subtypes of Rhetorical Restriction

From the sources

Types of Restriction can be classed according to:^{[7][2][5][6]}

- The nature of the exclusion (Intrinsic vs. Additive).
 - Additive Restriction is further classified by the state of the [addressee](#).
- The relationship between the two poles (Restriction of an Attribute to a Qualified vs. Restriction of a Qualified to an Attribute)

RESTRCT-IRS: Intrinsic Rhetorical Restriction (*al-qaṣr al-ḥaqīqī*)

From the sources

A form of Rhetorical Restriction in which the restricted-to is genuinely and exclusively specialised by the restricted according to reality and fact, not merely in relation to a specified comparator — the assignment admits of no exception whatsoever.^{[7][2][5][6]}

Annotation Unit	
ARDT	RESTRCT-IRS
Level	2 (Subtype)
BalaghaBase	Q412 ↗
Official Arabic name	<i>al-qaṣr al-ḥaqīqī</i> ^[8]

Source Example

لا إله إلا الله

There is no god but God

The attribute of divinity is restricted to God alone; according to Islamic theology this is absolutely and universally true, admitting no exception.^{[7][6]}

Constructed Example

لا خالق إلا الله

There is no creator but God

Explanation

The attribute of creation is assigned exclusively to God, with no possible exception — a paradigm case of Intrinsic Restriction.^{[7][6]}

RESTRCT-RSR: Relative Rhetorical Restriction (*al-qaṣr al-iḍāfi*)

From the sources

A form of Rhetorical Restriction in which the restriction holds only in relation (*bi-ḥasab al-iḍāfa*) to a specific comparator or context, not as an absolute universal truth. The **communicator** confines the restricted-to to the restricted relative to some particular other, not relative to all others in existence.^{[7][2][5][6]}

Annotation Unit	
ARDT	RESTRCT-RSR
Level	2 (Subtype)
	↳ Has 3 sub-subtypes
BalaghaBase	Q413
Official Arabic name	<i>al-qaṣr al-iḍāfi</i> ^[9]

Source Example

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ

And Muḥammad is nothing but a messenger; messengers before him have passed away (Qur'an, Āl 'Imrān 3:144)

Explanation

The Qur'anic verse restricts the Prophet Muḥammad to the attribute of messenger-hood in relation to those who may have supposed his status transcended mortality. It is Additive because Muḥammad plainly possessed other attributes (father, husband, judge, etc.); the restriction is relative to a particular false belief, not a universal claim.^{[2][6][4]}

Constructed Example

ما خليل إلا مسافر

Khalīl is nothing but a traveller

Explanation

This restricts the attribute of travelling to Khalīl in relation to a particular person (e.g., Maḥmūd), not as a claim that no other traveller exists in the world.^[2]

RESTRCT-SGR: Singular Rhetorical Restriction (*qaṣr ifrād*)

From the sources

A form of Rhetorical Restriction in which the **addressee** wrongly believes that the restricted-to participates in sharing the attribute with another — i.e., believes there is joint or shared possession. The **communicator** corrects this by confining the attribute or entity to one alone.^{[7][2][5][6]}

Annotation Unit	
ARDT	RESTRCT-SGR
Level	3 (Sub-subtype)
BalaghaBase	Q414
Official Arabic name	<i>qaṣr ifrād</i> ^[10]

Source Example

إِنَّمَا اللَّهُ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ

God is but one god (Qur'an, al-Nisā' 4:171)

Explanation

Addressed to those who believe in a plurality of gods or in the Trinity; the Restriction confines the attribute of divinity to God alone, correcting the belief in shared divinity.^[2]

Constructed Example

إنما الفائز أحمد

The winner is none but Aḥmad

Explanation

Said to an [addressee](#) who believes both Aḥmad and Khālīd won; the statement corrects the belief in shared victory by assigning it to Aḥmad alone.

RESTRCT-INV: Inversion Rhetorical Restriction (*qaṣr qalb*)

From the sources

A form of Rhetorical Restriction in which the [addressee](#) holds a belief contrary ('*aks*') to what the [communicator](#) is asserting. The [communicator](#) inverts the [addressee](#)'s mistaken judgment.^{[7][2][5][6]}

Annotation Unit

ARDT	RESTRCT-INV
Level	3 (Sub-subtype)
BalaghaBase	Q415 
Official Arabic name	<i>qaṣr qalb</i> ^[10]

Source Example

مَا الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ

The Messiah, son of Mary, was nothing but a messenger; messengers before him have passed away (Qur'an, al-Mā'ida 5:75)

Explanation

Addressed to those who believe Jesus was divine; the Restriction inverts that belief by confining him to the attribute of messenger-hood.^[6]

Constructed Example

ما سافر إلا عليّ

None travelled but 'Alī

Explanation

Said to an [addressee](#) who believes Khalīl (not 'Alī) was the one who travelled; the statement inverts that judgment.^[2]

From the sources

A form of Rhetorical Restriction in which the [addressee](#) is uncertain or hesitant — suspended between two possibilities — and the [communicator](#) designates the correct one.^{[7][2][5][6]}

Annotation Unit	
ARDT	RESTRCT-DSG
Level	3 (Sub-subtype)
BalaghaBase	Q416 ↗
Official Arabic name	<i>qaṣr ta'yīn</i> ^[10]

Source Example [↗](#)

الأرض متحركة لا ثابتة

The earth is moving, not stationary

Explanation

Said to an [addressee](#) who is uncertain whether the earth moves or is fixed; the Restriction resolves the doubt by designating the correct attribute.^[2]

Constructed Example [↗](#)

إنما الفائز خالد

The winner is none but Khālid

Explanation

Said to an [addressee](#) who is uncertain whether Aḥmad or Khālid won; the Restriction designates the correct answer.^{[2][6]}

RESTRCT-TPO: Rhetorical Restriction by Relationship Between the Two Poles (*taqṣīm al-qaṣr bi-i'tibār ṭarafayhi*)

A form of Rhetorical Restriction in which there is a relationship between the two poles of restriction.

RESTRCT-AQE: Rhetorical Restriction of an Attribute to an Entity (*qaṣr ṣifa 'alā mawṣūf*)

From the sources

A form of Rhetorical Restriction in which an attribute (the restricted) is confined to a specific qualified entity (the restricted-to), such that no other entity shares that attribute — or, in the Additive case, no other specified entity shares it.^{[7][2][6]}

Annotation Unit	
ARDT	RESTRCT-TPO
Level	2 (Subtype) ↳ Has 2 sub-subtypes
BalaghaBase	Q417 ↗
Arabic name	<i>taqṣīm al-qaṣr bi-i'tibār ṭarafayhi</i>

Source Example [↗](#)

لا رازق إلا الله

There is no provider but God

Explanation

The attribute of providing sustenance is confined to God alone. The attribute (provisioning) is the restricted; God is the restricted-to (the qualified).^[2]

Constructed Example [↗](#)

Annotation Unit	
ARDT	RESTRCT-AQE
Level	3 (Sub-subtype)
BalaghaBase	Q418 ↗
Official Arabic name	<i>qaṣr ṣifa 'alā mawṣūf</i> ^[8]

إنما الشجاع عليّ

The courageous one is none but 'Alī

Explanation

The attribute of courage is restricted to 'Alī as its qualified bearer. No other person is being assigned this quality in the given context.

RESTRCT-QAE: Rhetorical Restriction of an Entity to an Attribute (*qaṣr mawṣūf 'alā ṣifa*)

From the sources

A form of Rhetorical Restriction in which a qualified entity (the restricted) is confined to a specific attribute (the restricted-to), such that it is known by or characterised by that attribute above all others — though other entities may also share that attribute. The qualified becomes identified primarily with that attribute in the given context.^{[7][2][6]}

Annotation Unit

ARDT	RESTRCT-QAE
Level	3 (Sub-subtype)
BalaghaBase	Q419 ↗
Official Arabic name	<i>qaṣr mawṣūf 'alā ṣifa</i> ^[8]

Sources note that this type almost never occurs in Intrinsic Rhetorical Restriction, because it is practically impossible to enumerate and negate all attributes of a thing except one. It occurs commonly, however, in Additive Rhetorical Restriction.^[2]

Source Example [↗](#)

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ

And Muḥammad is nothing but a messenger (Qur'an, Āl 'Imrān 3:144)

Explanation

Muḥammad (the qualified, restricted) is confined to the attribute of messenger-hood (the restricted-to), relative to those who wrongly supposed him immortal. Other attributes of Muḥammad are not denied in absolute terms.^{[2][6][4]}

Source Example [↗](#)

ما الجاحظ إلا كاتب

Al-Jāḥiẓ is nothing but a writer

Explanation

Al-Jāḥiẓ (the qualified) is restricted to the attribute of writing, in a context where one wishes to counter the impression that he was principally a poet or orator.^[6]

Source Example [↗](#)

ما شوقي إلا شاعر

Shawqī is **nothing but** a poet

Explanation

Here *Shawqī* is the restricted and *shā'ir* (poet) is the restricted-to, because poetry is confined to Shawqī through negation and exception.^[2]

Examples

Examples are distributed within the subtypes above. The following are additional source examples illustrating Rhetorical Restriction more broadly.

Source Example

قُلْ لَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ الْغَيْبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ
Qur'an 27:65

Say: None in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen except God

Explanation

Negation-and-exception construction restricting knowledge of the unseen to God alone; an instance of Intrinsic Rhetorical Restriction and Rhetorical Restriction of an Attribute to a Qualified.^[3]

Source Example

إِلَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِلَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ
Qur'an 1:5

You alone we worship, and You alone we seek for help

Explanation

The objects of worship and assistance are fronted (*taqdīm mā ḥaqquhu al-ta'khīr*), restricting worship and assistance to God alone.^{[3][2][5]}

Source Example

إنما العرب أوفياء

The Arabs are nothing but loyal

Explanation

The attribute of loyalty is restricted to the Arabs using *innamā*; an instance of Restriction of an Attribute to a Qualified (Additive).^[7]

Source Example

الفخر بالمرء لا بأبيه

Pride is in a person himself, not in his father

Explanation

The conjunctive *lā* restricts pride to the person's own merits, excluding paternal lineage. The restricted-to is what precedes *lā*.^[3]

Different From

- Affirmation by Negation:** In Affirmation by Negation, an attribute is not explicitly stated but is hinted at through the negation

of its opposite. In Rhetorical Restriction, by contrast, both the restricted element and the restricted-to are explicitly present in the sentence, and the purpose is the exclusive assignment of one to the other.^[1]

- **RESTRCT: Rhetorical Restriction** - Rhetorical Restriction confines an attribute, entity, or matter to a particular alternative, including through negation and exception. PRAISE-EXH uses an exhausted exception that may simultaneously produce Restriction, but additionally presents a praiseworthy quality or action as the only supposed grounds for blame. The two devices may therefore co-occur in the same expression.

Notes

Technical

- The four principal means of Restriction discussed in sources are: negation-and-exception, *innamā*, conjunctive particles (*lā*, *bal*, *lākin*), and fronting. Al-Hāshimī (1948/2019) notes that other means exist (e.g., *wahdahū*, *faqat*, the separating pronoun, the definite article) but these lack the rhetorical subtleties of the four principal means.^[2]
- *Innamā* is used for matters the [addressee](#) does not deny or is unaware of, and whose Restriction is intended merely as a reminder or alert (*tanbīh*); whereas negation-and-exception is used for matters the [addressee](#) denies or is expected to deny, requiring explicit assertion.^{[2][6]}
- The *lā* conjunctive cannot co-occur with negation-and-exception in the same construction; it can co-occur with *innamā* and with fronting.^[2]
- *Ghayr* functions like *illā* in producing Restriction and likewise cannot co-occur with the *lā* conjunctive.^[2]
- The term "attribute" (*ṣifa*) in the context of Restriction denotes a meaning that inheres in something else — whether expressed by a verb, participle, or noun — and does not refer to the grammatical adjective (*naʿt*) in the syntactic sense.^[2]
- Restriction of a Qualified to an Attribute in the Intrinsic type scarcely occurs in practice, because it is impossible to enumerate and negate all attributes of a thing save one. This type is common only as Additive Restriction.^[2]
- The three [addressee](#)-based subdivisions of Additive Restriction (Singular, Inversion, Designation) do not apply to Intrinsic Restriction.^[2]

Historical

- The technical term in the science of *ʿilm al-maʿānī* is: the specialisation of a thing by another thing, or of a matter by another matter, through a designated means (*takhṣīs shayʿ bi-shayʿ bi-tarīq makḥṣūs*).^{[3][7][4][5][6]}
- The Qurʾanic verse *ḥūrun maqṣūrātun fī al-khiyām* (al-Raḥmān 55:72) is cited by multiple sources as the origin of the term's technical meaning, derived from the literal sense of confinement.^{[7][6][4]}
- ʿAbbās (1997) traces the technical definition "specialisation of a thing by another through a designated means" as the settled formulation (*al-taʾrif al-mukhtār*) among rhetoricians.^[6]

See Also

- [Qaṣr: A tiny word, a big meaning, and an apology](#)

References

- ↑ ^[*a b c d e f g*] Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis*  (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 166-176, [ISBN 9780415386098](#). DOI: [10.4324/9780203965399](#)
- ↑ ^[*a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z a a a b a c a d a e a f a g a h a i a j a k a l a m a n a o*] Aḥmad al-Hāshimī, *Jawāhir al-Balāgha fī al-Maʿānī wa-al-Bayān wa-al-Baḍʿ* (Windsor: Hindāwī Foundation, 2019), 179-196, [ISBN 9781527316386](#).
- ↑ ^[*a b c d e f*] Inʿam Fawwal ʿAkkawī, *al-Muʿjam al-Mufasssal fī ʿUlum al-Balagha: al-Baḍʿ wa-l-Bayan wa-l-Maʿānī* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), 621.
- ↑ ^[*a b c d e f g h*] Ayman Amin Abd Al-Ghani, *Al-Kāfi fī al-Balāgha: Al-Bayān, wa al-Baḍʿ wa al-Maʿānī* (Cairo: Dār al-Tawfiqīyya lil-Turāth, 2011), 408-414.
- ↑ ^[*a b c d e f g h i j*] Ḥafnī Nāṣif, Muḥammad Diyāb, Sultan Muḥammad and Muṣṭafā Ṭammām, *Durūs al-Balāgha* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2012), 63-65, [ISBN 9786144162798](#).
- ↑ ^[*a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z a a a b a c*] Faḍl Ḥasan ʿAbbās, *Al-Balāgha: Funūnuhā wa-Afnānuhā - ʿIlm al-Maʿānī* (Irbid: Dār al-Furqān lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 1997), 357-386.
- ↑ ^[*a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u*] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Atīq, *ʿIlm al-Maʿānī* (Cairo: Dār al-Āfāq al-ʿArabiyya, 2006), 114-122, [ISBN 9773440764](#).
- ↑ ^[*a b c*] Ḥafnī Nāṣif, Muḥammad Diyāb, Sultan Muḥammad and Muṣṭafā Ṭammām, *Durūs al-Balāgha* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2012), 63, [ISBN 9786144162798](#).
- ↑ Ḥafnī Nāṣif, Muḥammad Diyāb, Sultan Muḥammad and Muṣṭafā Ṭammām, *Durūs al-Balāgha* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2012), 63-64, [ISBN 9786144162798](#).
- ↑ ^[*a b c*] Ḥafnī Nāṣif, Muḥammad Diyāb, Sultan Muḥammad and Muṣṭafā Ṭammām, *Durūs al-Balāgha* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2012), 64, [ISBN 9786144162798](#).

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