
A Gender-based Stylistic Analysis of Selected English Love Poems

Qaisar Taha Muhammed
University of Baghdad/College of Arts
Kaiser.taha1203b@coart.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Asst. Prof. Khalid Sh. Sharhan, PHD
Imam Al-Kadhumi College
dr.khalidsharhan@alkadhumi-col.edu.iq

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ABSTRACT:

One of the most interesting issues in the study of language is the relation between language and gender. A lot of studies have been conducted so far to find out if men speak and write differently from women. The present study is also an attempt in the same area but it considers gender differences in love poetry. It aims to find out the differences between male and female poets in their love poems. The data of the study consists of three male love poems, and three female poems. Leech and Short's (1981) checklist is used as a framework to analyze the selected love poems. The findings of the study reveal that there are differences between male and female poets with regard to lexical categories, grammatical categories and figures of speech.

Key words: *style, stylistics, and gender.*

1.Introduction**1.1 Style**

The term style has many different implications. Galperin mentions some definitions of the word 'style' suggested by a number of scholars. For Buffon, "Style is the man himself"; Derbyshire "Style is depth"; Enkvist "Style is deviations"; Murry "Style is a quality of language which communicates precisely emotions or thoughts, or a system of emotions or thoughts, peculiar to the author"; and Bloomfield "Style is a selection of non-distinctive features of language" (1977, p.11).

According to Warner (1961, p.1), style is "the manner of expressing one's thoughts and feelings in words." For Leech (2014), "style is a way in which something is spoken, written or performed." Authors and writers utilize various styles to present their views. Thus, style is distinguished from one to another. Haynes (1989) says, "style is the study of distinctions." Finch (2000, p. 189) states that "every time we use language, we necessarily adopt a style of some sort: we make a selection from a range of syntactic and lexical possibilities according to the purpose of the communication."

1.2 Stylistics

Leech and Short (1981, p.74) say "stylistics is the study of style, it describes that what is used and how is used to make of language. They remark that stylistic analysis is "an attempt to find the artistic principles underlying a writer choice of language. According to Widdowson (2014), "stylistics is the study of literary language from stylistics coordination." Crystal (2008, p. 460) defines stylistics as "a branch of linguistics which studies the features of situationally distinctive uses (varieties) of language, and tries to establish principles capable of accounting for the particular choices made by individual and social groups in their use of language. "

1.3 Gender

According to West & Zimmerman (1987, p. 127), gender "is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category." It should be noted that gender is different from sex. Cameron (2006, p. 724) states, "sex is a word used in connection with the biological characteristics that mark humans and other animals as either male or female whereas gender refers to the cultural traits and behaviours deemed appropriate for men or women by a particular society." Butler (2006, p. 45) says that gender is "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory framework which congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a 'natural' kind of being."

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The present study uses a mixed research method, i.e., quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. Woods, Fletcher, and Hughes (1989) say that statistical (quantitative) analysis is crucial in the linguistic analysis since it helps linguistics synthesize and interpret complex linguistic data and make conclusions from it. According to Creswell (2009: 4), qualitative method is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The qualitative research method allows one to explore and understand a particular phenomenon and interpret it.

2.2 Data Collection and Unit of Analysis

The data of this study consists of 3 love poems written by male and three by female poets in the 19th century. They were collected randomly without any prior intention. The units of analysis in this study are the lexical category such as noun, verb, adjective, adverb, noun and verb phrases, dependent clauses and the sentence.

2.3 Framework of Analysis

Leech and Short's (1981) checklist is used to examine the writing styles of male/female poets to find out the differences in their respective styles of love poetry. The categories used in that checklist are mentioned below.

2.3.1 Lexical categories

According to Quirk et al. (1985, p. 67), these are called word classes and fall into two types: open classes, which include content words (nouns,

verbs, adjectives, and adverbs words), and closed-class which include function words (prepositions, pronouns, determiners, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, etc.).

Nouns

Nouns in this study will be analyzed in terms of abstract vs. concrete and nouns related to nature vs. nouns related to humans.

Verbs

In this study, the verbs investigated are transitive vs. intransitive, stative vs. dynamic, and Halliday's transitivity six verb processes: material, mental, verbal, existential, relational, and behavioural.

Adjectives

The classes of adjectives analyzed in this study are: stative and dynamic, adjectives and physical, psychological and adjectives, gradable and non-gradable, and attributive and predictive adjectives.

Adverbs

From the seven major classes of adverbs which are distinguished by Quirk et al. (1985, p. 479), space, time, process, and degree adverbs are used in this study.

2.3.2 Grammatical Categories

Noun phrases

The noun phrases analysed in this study are simple ones and complex ones with pre-modification and post-modification.

Verb Phrases

In this study, the present, past, and future tense, and modal auxiliary verbs like 'must, can, and may' will be tackled in analyzing verb phrases.

Clause Types

The types include nominal, adverbial, relative, and comparative clauses.

2.3.3 Figures of speech

Figures of speech investigated in this paper fall into two categories which are schemes such as repetition and parallelism and tropes like simile metaphor personification hyperbole

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the analysis of lyrical love poems written by both male and female poets.

3.1 Male Love Poems

John Clare's "First Love"

The English poet John Clare was born in 1793 and died in 1864 in England. The poem *First Love* is about his feelings of unrequited love for a wealthy farmer's daughter, Mary Joyce. It reflects the strong influence of love on the poet. (Academic De-Stressor, 2018).

Robert Browning's "Love in a Life"

Robert Browning, a British poet, born in London in 1812 and died in Italy in 1889, was a popular Victorian literary figure. The poem *Love in a Life* is about a man's eternal search for a woman (Stoodley, 2012).

William Wordsworth's "Perfect woman"

Wordsworth was born in Cumberland in 1770 and died in 1850 (Mukherjee, 2005). Hess (2019) says that the poem, 'Perfect woman', is a romantic, lyrical ballad about his wife, Mary Hutchinson, whom he had known since childhood.

3.2 Female Love Poems

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "How do I love thee?"

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was born in 1806 in London and died in 1861 in Italy. "She was self-taught in almost every respect" (Everett 2002). The poetess in the poem declares her everlasting love for her lover.

Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Norton's "I Do Not Love Thee"

The English poetess and novelist Caroline was born in 1808 and died in 1877 in London. (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia, 2021). Caroline starts her poem with the statement, 'I do not love thee', which is repeated in all stanzas and followed by a reference to certain things which bother her like the lover's deep blue eyes that absorb her, his perfect doing of things and his sound (Baldwin, 2019).

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Stanzas "Oh, come to me in dreams, my love!"

The English author Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was born in London in 1797 and died there in 1851 (Kuiper 2021). According to Nesa (2019), the poem is intended to be a memoir of her tempestuous relationship with Percy Bysshe Shelley. (Paper Patches, 2018).

3.3 Lexical Categories

Distribution of Lexical Categories in Male/Female Love Poems

Lexical Categories	Love poems	
	Male poets	Female poets
	%	%
Nouns	48.10	40.3
Verbs	29.49	36.06
Adjectives	14.00	13.8
Adverbs	7.23	10.53
Total	100	100

The table shows that male poets (henceforth, MPs) use nouns with a percentage of (48.10%) in their love poems more than female poets (henceforth, FPs) (40.3%). FPs use verbs with a higher percentage (36.06%) than MPs who use them with a percentage of (29.49%). The adjectives used by MPs comprise (14.00%) while those used by FPs constitute (13.8%). Adverbs are used by FPs with (10.53%) and (7.23%) by MPs, respectively. So, it can be inferred that MPs depend extensively on nouns to express love and convey their feelings in poems. FPs rely on verbs in expressing love for their beloveds. Adjectives and adverbs are used slightly similar by MPs and FPs.

Nouns*Distribution of Nouns in Male/Female Love Poems*

Nouns' Types	Love poems	
	Male poets	Female poets
	%	%
Abstract Ns.	50.56	71.75
Concrete Ns.	50.05	27.08
Nature Ns.	15.64	16.62
Humans Ns.	84.27	82.22
Total	100	100

Concerning abstract nouns in love poems, FPs use them (71.75%) more than MPs (50.56%); this indicates that FPs' style is based on imagination, sensation, and emotions in expressing their feelings to the ones they love. MPs tend to use concrete nouns (50.05%) more than FPs (27.08%); this shows that MPs' style is more realistic, reasonable, and energetic in expressing love for their beloved. Both MPs and FPs are almost similar in their use of nouns related to nature (15.64%) (16.62%), respectively. MPs and FPs' manner of using these nouns help in creating metaphors and depict how their perception of things around them and their connection with humans. The same thing can be said about nouns related to humans; MPs and FPs use them relatively equally (84.27%) (82.22%), respectively. This means that they are concerned with humanly things that surround the beloved one.

Verbs*Verbs Types and their Frequencies in Male/Female Love Poems*

Verbs' Types	Love poems	
	Male poets	Female poets
	%	%
Syntactic Types		
Transitive Vs.	32.44	47.48
Intransitive Vs.	67.55	50.39
Semantic Types		
Stative Vs.	33.98	48.64
Dynamic Vs.	67.2	51.35
Verb Processes		
Material Vs.	51.02	42.44
Mental Vs.	18.92	35.18
Verbal Vs.	-	5.26
Existential Vs.	-	-
Relational Vs.	14.23	9.75
Behavior Vs.	5.92	3.83
Total	100	100

As the table above shows, transitive verbs used by FPs comprise (47.48%) while those used by MPs constitute (32.44%). According to

Short, transitive verbs signify purposefully directed movement, while intransitive verbs are undirected (1996, p. 339). Thus, FPs' use of transitive verbs signifies that they have a direct goal, i.e., to win the heart of their beloved. As table 4.111 shows, MPs use intransitive verbs (67.55%) more than FPs (50.39%).

Stative verbs are used by MPs with a percentage of (33.98%), while FPs use them with (48.64%). It can be said that FPs' style in utilizing stative verbs reflects their stability of mind, determination, and focus on love and the beloved. MPs' employment of dynamic verbs with a higher percentage (67.2%) indicates that they are mentally and physically active and ready to do anything for the one they love. In contrast, FPs use dynamic verbs with a smaller percentage (51.35%).

Concerning transitivity, material verbs used by MPs comprise (51.02%) and by FPs (42.44%). This demonstrates MPs' realistic and active tone in expressing their love. Mental verbs are used by FPs with a percentage of (35.18%) to package their thoughts and feelings, while MPs use them with (18.92%). Table 4.111 shows that MPs do not use verbal verbs in their love poems, whereas FPs use them with the least percentage (5.26%). The stylistic significance can be interpreted as MPs and FPs addressing the one they love directly in their poems. Relational verbs are used with the percentage (14.23%) and (9.75%) by MPs and FPs, respectively. This reflects that both genders aim to be in touch and connected with their beloved ones. Behavioral verbs are not used with a significant difference, FPs use them with (3.83%), and MPs use them with (5.92%).

Adjectives

Distribution of Adjectives in Male/Female Love Poems

Adjectives' Types	Love poems	
	Male poets	Female poets
	%	%
Stative Adjs.	66.04	73.57
Dynamic Adjs.	33.95	26.42
Physical Adjs.	41.08	25.07
Psychological Adjs.	44.35	55.15
Gradable Adjs.	61.79	62.69
Non-gradable Adjs.	36.97	37.3
Attributive Adjs.	91.66	88.88
Predictive Adjs.	8.33	11.11
Total	100	100

The table demonstrates that FPs use stative adjectives with a percentage of (73.57%). As a feature of style, this reveals that FPs' love is constant and never changes over time. MPs use stative adjectives less, with (66.04%). Dynamic adjectives are used with a percentage of (33.95%) by MPs, but with a percentage of (26.42%) by FPs. Thus, there is a difference in employing these semantic types of adjectives.

MPs use physical adjectives with a percentage of (41.08%), more than FPs (25.07). In comparison, FPs use more psychological adjectives (55.15%) than MPs (44.35%). In stylistic terms, using these semantic types reveals that MPs focus on the physical attributes of the one they love, or it can be said that MPs resort to tangible things to give more details about the nouns they modify. FPs prefer to express their psychological emotions, ideas and thoughts through psychological adjectives. It can be suggested that MPs are more open while FPs are closed in expressing their feelings of love. There is a closeness in using gradable (61.79%) (62.69%), non-gradable (36.97%) (37.3%), attributive (91.66%) (88.88%), and predictive adjectives (8.33%) (11.11%), respectively by MPs and FPs, as table 4.112 shows.

Adverbs

Distribution of Adverbs in Male/Female Love Poems

Adverbs' Types	Love poems	
	Male poets	Female poets
	%	%
Space Advs.	6.66	2.08
Time Advs.	41.11	43.75
Process Advs.	19.44	35.41
Degree Advs.	10.83	12.5
Others Advs.	21.94	6.25
Total	100	100

The table illustrates that MPs and FPs use adverbs quite closely, as the percentages show. MPs' style in employing slightly more space adverbs (6.66%) than FPs (2.08%) reveals that certain places remind them of their beloved ones. Closeness is noticed in using time adverbs with (41.11%) (43.75%) and degree adverbs (10.83%) (12.5%) by MPs and FPs, respectively. As for process adverbs, FPs employ them (35.41%) more than MPs (19.44%). This indicates that FPs' style reflects the significance of action and the mental verbs that show how they love their lovers.

3.4 Grammatical Categories

Noun Phrases and Verb Phrases

Distribution of Noun Phrases in Male/Female Love Poems

Noun Phrases	Love poems	
	Male poets	Female poets
	%	%
Simple Noun Phrases	34.03	28.19
Complex Noun Phrases	32.97	35.9
Complex with Pre-	18.57	34.57
Complex with post-	14.25	15.34
Total	100	100

The percentage of simple NPs used by MPs is (34.03%) and by FPs is (28.19%), as table 4.114 illustrates. The percentage of complex noun phrases is slightly higher in FPs' poems (35.9%) than in MPs' ones

(32.97%). This demonstrates that MPs have a tendency to employ less complexity than FPs in their love poems. It can be said that MPs use a simple style to convince the addressed one of their love and emotions. Coates says that women in the nineteenth century tried to gain a prominent position in society (2004). Thus, one can say that FPs favoured complex NPs to show that they were educated and capable of being equal with men. Alternatively, it can be said that FPs use more complex NPs due to the disturbance of feelings and emotions in expressing their love. Concerning pre-modification, FPs use it with (34.57%) while MPs use it with (18.57%), especially the pre-modification by adjectives. The other pre-modification types are of genitive and nouns. The style of FPs shows that they try to get the attention and create an emphasis to the addressed one by employing more pre-modification to noun phrases. Both genders similarly employ post-modification by relative clauses, prepositional phrases, and nonfinite clauses.

Distribution of Verb Phrases in Male/Female Love Poems

Verb Phrases	Love poems	
	Male poets	Female poets
	%	%
Present tense VPs	38.38	71.16
Past tense VPs	55.40	13.12
Future tense VPs	1.85	11.15
Modal auxiliary VPs	4.34	4.55
Total	100	100

The table shows that the present tense is used by FPs with a percentage of (71.16%), while MPs use it with (38.38%). The stylistic significance of using present VPs by FPs shows that they are concerned with the current situation of loving their beloved. MPs employ past tense (55.40%) more than FPs (13.12%). MPs' employing these VPs shows that they are concerned about the past of the one they love. Also, it can be said that they make a recollection of the memories about the beloved one. Future tense VPs are used by FPs with (11.15%) more than MPs (1.85%). FPs' using future tense shows that they want to be with the one they love forever and are worried about what will happen in the future. Concerning modal auxiliary VPs, both genders use them similarly, as table 4.116 shows.

Clause Types

Distribution of DCs in Male/Female Love/ Elegy Poems

Types of DCs	Love poems	
	Male poets	Female poets
	%	%
Nominal DCs	13.10	21.15
Adverbial DCs	28.46	54.57
Relative DCs	52.48	22.30
Comparative DCs	13.10	1.96
Total	100	100

The table above illustrates that FPs use nominal DCs with a percentage of (21.15%) to show the confirmations and justifications of their love. They also use adverbial DCs, which comprise (54.57%) more than MPs(28.46%). Through this feature of style, they try to persuade the addressed lover of their constant love. These adverbial DCs also help FPs give more description to verbs. Moreover, part of the complexity in expressing their emotions and thoughts is achieved by employing these two kinds of DCs.

MPs exceed FPs in their use of relative DCs, which comprise (52.48%). This reveals that MPs' style conveys a strong bond between them and those addressed. It can be said that MPs try to convince their lovers that they are always close to their hearts and minds. Also, one can say that MPs make the structure look more complex by using more relative DCs to give more details and describe a feature or a trait that the addressed one possesses or is being given. MPs also use comparative DCs (13.10%) more than FPs (1.96%) to compare their beloved ones to unique things to show how they are special and dear to them.

The statical analysis shows that FPs use finite and non-finite DCs more than MPs, while the latter use reduced (for the sake of compressing the idea, and to be briefer in expressing their emotions) and non-restrictive relative clauses more than FPs. Both genders are similar in using restrictive DCs.

3.5 Figures of Speech

Distribution of Figures of Speech in Male/Female Love Poems

Figures of Speech	Love poems	
	Male poets	Female poets
	%	%
Repetition	21.91	23.06
Parallelism	19.17	18.35
Simile	4.44	5.25
Metaphor	17.59	20.94
Personification	12.96	10.72
Hyperbole	23.95	21.64
Total	100	100

The table reveals that percentages of figures of speech are relatively similar for male and female poems. The use of simile, which comprises (4.44%) and (5.25%) by MPs and FPs, respectively, shows that both try to compare the beloved one to something unique. The percentages of metaphor (17.59%) (20.94%), personification (12.96%) and (10.72%), parallelism (19.17%) and (18.35%), by MPs and FPs respectively suggest that they are relatively similarly by both genders.

The percentage of repetition (23.06%) by FPs is nearly close to that by MPs (21.91%). Thus, FPs use repetition to emphasize certain words, ideas, or points to inform the reader of their significance to the central theme or idea they want to convey. Hyperbole is used with the same percentages (23.95%) by MPs and (21.64%) by FPs.

4. Conclusion

The paper has revealed gender differences in the language of love poems written in the same period by male and female poets. These differences are more noticeable at some levels than others. For example, at the lexical level, male poets used more nouns than female poets and the latter use more verbs than the former. As for concrete and abstract nouns, male poets use the former more frequently while female poets use the latter more frequently.

At the grammatical level, female poets tend to use complex noun phrases more than male poets. As for clause types, nominal and adverbial clauses are more frequent in female poems while relative clauses are more frequent in male poems.

As for figures of speech there are marginal differences between the two genders in using parallelism, repetition, metaphor, simile, personification and hyperbole.

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