

## Women and Men in Writing Science Fiction Short Stories

Shatha Alkhalaf\*

*Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of English and Translation, College of Sciences and Arts, Methnab, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia*

**Corresponding Author:** Shatha Alkhalaf, E-mail: alkh4901@fredonia.edu

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: August 06, 2019

Accepted: October 23, 2019

Published: November 30, 2019

Volume: 8 Issue: 6

Advance access: November 2019

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

### ABSTRACT

No one can deny the role that short stories have played in the life of humans since time immemorial. They do not only keep family members close, but also strengthen the bond of those who share the same interest and happen to exchange them with each other. The current study discusses the significance of short stories in general and investigates the impact of writer's gender on the writing of science fiction short stories. To do so, eight short stories were analysed.

**Key words:** Short Stories, Gender Writing, Science Fiction

### INTRODUCTION

Since early childhood, we used to listen to stories from parents, grandparents, and teachers. Still, most of us like reading stories, and yet we enjoy them despite nowadays technology. Stories are used to entertain, teach, record history, convey wisdom, explain faiths, share new ideas, inform experience, and more. Some people prefer reading for a particular storyteller while others like reading for another one. There are many aspects that may affect narrative and make a writer different than the other, such as education, experience, age, gender, etc. Thus, the focus of this paper is on one portion, which is gender. Moreover, stories have many different genres such as comedy, crime, science fiction, mystery, horror, and more. However, this research paper centered on only one genre, which is science fiction. Thus, it concentrated on the impact of writer's gender on writing science fiction short stories.

As I learned from Talbot (2010), there are differences among women and men in oral storytelling. For example, in men's stories, protagonist is usually the teller or another male. On the other hand, protagonist in women stories is another person whether male or female (Talbot, 2010). Therefore, this study aimed to explore whether or not such variations applied to science fiction short stories. This study is important because it would help readers differentiate writing style between female and male storytellers. This research is being conducted because the results can be used to help readers to choose the writing style that they prefer. This research paper analyzed eight science fiction short stories, four written by males and the other four by females. Hence,

this paper tended to examine the impact of authors' gender on writing science fiction short stories by addressing the following questions.

### Research Questions

1. How often do women and men authors classify protagonist as male or female in writing science fiction short stories?
2. How frequently do female and male writers use "dialogues" in science fiction short stories?
3. How frequently do women and men authors use "adverbs" in science fiction short stories?
4. How usually do female and male storytellers conclude their science fiction short stories (happy, sad, or disappointed ending)?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Gender and Favorite Genre

This first section discusses writing among women and men. In other words, this section presents the preferred writing genre for females and males. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2019) stated that the type of stories are affected by the gender of the narrator. A study of 4374 writing pieces from Best American anthologies conducted to see if there is a correlation between the type of writing genre and the writer's gender (Oggins, 2014). More specifically, Oggins investigated anthologies of short stories, poetry, essays, and nonfictions that published between 1978 and 2012. She found that women

write short stories more likely than other genres. She, also, ranked the frequency of women's writing by indicating that short stories are the most frequent genre, followed by poetry, essays, and nonfictions respectively. On the other hand, men's writing are mostly essays and nonfictions, especially science writing. Oggins stated that male science writing are more reasonable than female science writing. However, women report that many of them write about science and political topics but their writing are not taken seriously to be published. Oggins informed that women's writing were marginalized since men editors, who were the majority, tended to present more males' writing than females'. She argued that restricting women's writing would limit their voice, so female editors are needed not temporarily but over time. She went on to say "The greatest evidence for women's having a voice would come if more women's work was published in the anthologies every year" (p. 193). One of Oggins interpretations of gender and writing fields is that probably women and men authors have different predilection for writing genres. Therefore, the following sections focus on the distinction between females and males in narrative.

### Women's Narrative Style

Georgakopoulou (1995) conducted a study of 70 women's stories and 130 men's stories to investigate the differences between Greek women's and men's discourse styles in storytelling. According to Georgakopoulou, the animated character or the protagonist of women's stories is usually a man. Nearly 76% of females' stories presented the protagonist as a man. Conversely, Talbot (2010) stated that the protagonist in women stories is another person whether male or female.

As reported by Georgakopoulou (1995), women's stories primarily include self-depreciation. Moreover, themes of females' stories are commonly about embarrassment, fear, self-mocking, and gaffes. Also, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2019) found that, unlike males, females concentrate on solidarity over competitiveness. Likewise, Talbot (2010) exhibited that themes of women's narrative are generally about embarrassment, fear, and skill abetted by luck. Talbot, also, mentioned that women provide more detail on characters, named characters, and dialogue. Additionally, women tend to focus on social reality (Talbot, 2010).

Page (2002) proceeded to study the variations between females and males in storytelling by asking them about the birth of their children. The participants in this study were nine couples and five women. Page (2002) found that females are more concerned with affectual meaning. Women, as Page argued, narrate their stories emotionally more than informatively. Page notices that females are more accurate terminology when they talk about medical procedures or personnel. Besides, women tend to use hedges considerably (Page, 2002). This reminded me of Talbot (2010) when she mentioned hedges as one of women's language features. She indicated that women use hedges to express uncertainty, tentativeness, or fear of being too masculine.

Rodgers and Thorson (2003) conducted a research on how women and men reporters sourced and farmed their

stories across three U.S. daily newspapers. They confirmed that there is a correlation between gender differences and reporting differences in sourcing, story topic, and story tone. For sourcing, women used a wider diversity of female and ethnic sources. Females' story topic, as Rodgers and Thorson reported, were nonstereotypical in nature. Regarding story tone, females journalists wrote mostly positive stories.

### Men's Narrative Style

Returning to Georgakopoulou (1995), the animated character or the protagonist of men's stories is often a man. Mostly, men refers to themselves as the protagonist of their own stories. A percentage of 91% of males' stories showed the protagonist as a man. Similarly, Talbot (2010) showed that the protagonist is usually the teller or another male in men's stories.

According to Georgakopoulou (1995), men's narratives mainly present adversatives and competitiveness. Furthermore, themes of males' stories are ordinarily about disagreement, conflict, aggression, and competitiveness. Comparably, Talbot (2010) displayed that themes of men's stories are normally about skill, resourcefulness, and heroism. Moreover, Talbot indicated that men provide more details on place, time, and object description. Male storytellers are usually focus more on individual reality (Talbot, 2010).

As stated by Page (2002), male speakers emphasize informative content when they recount the birth of their children. Male narrators get involved with information, so they conveyed factual information more than females did (Page, 2002). The only similarity between women's and men's narrative that Page noticed is that they both talk about their experience as "a series of linked anecdotes rather than as more conventional, plot-driven stories" (p. 111).

Rodgers and Thorson study, that investigated three U.S. daily newspapers, informed that male reporters used less sources than females did. Moreover, men wrote more negative stories than females. Male journalists stereotyped more than females did. Therefore, the finding of this study provide a strong support to hire more female journalists.

### Why Science Fiction

Why should literary linguists be interested in science fiction? This was the question that Stockwell investigated in 2003. Stockwell (2003) indicated that "science fiction can do some discursal things that no other form of literature can do" (p.195). He explained that the reason behind that is that science fiction includes all features of our actual world and all imaginary features of non-actual worlds. On the other hand, other types of literatures are limited to the actual world (Stockwell, 2003).

Finally, most researchers discussed variations of narrative style among women and men in newspapers or as oral narrative. However, there are very few studies addressed the differences between female and male storytellers in writing science fiction short stories. Therefore, this research paper analyzed eight science fiction short stories, four written by males and the other four by females.

## METHODOLOGY

This study aims to discover the differences in writing science fiction short stories between women and men. Therefore, eight short stories were selected from <http://365tomorrows.com> in order to be analyzed. This website is great because you can find a new story daily, and the most important part is that you can see the name of an author so you can know for sure his/her gender. This website was picked in particular for two reasons. First, the website presents only science fiction short stories which is the targeted data in this study. Second reason is showing the gender of a storyteller by presenting his/her real name. Eight stories were collected from the website <http://365tomorrows.com> based on the name of the author. Since I am not a native English speaker and I do not know the English female and male names, I was searching for each name by Google in order to be confident of the storyteller's gender. Therefore, the data were adequate to answer the research questions. However, there are some possible arguments against the validity of these data. These limitations are the number of the analyzed short stories and their source. The total number of the analyzed science fiction short stories were only eight which may not represent the main features of female and male writers. Moreover, the data were collected from one website which may not represent science fiction short stories in books, magazines, or other online resources.

In order to organize the data, the researcher coded each story. Thus, the females' stories were coded in Table 1 while the males' stories were coded in Table 2.

In order to answer the first and the fourth research questions, which are about the protagonist and conclusion of a story, the researcher read each story carefully to determine the gender of the protagonist and how the story concluded. Then, she represented the results in schedules for better organization. One schedule shows the protagonist for each story while the other schedule indicates the conclusion for each story.

For the second and third questions, which are about the frequency of dialogues and adverbs, the researcher organized data into Excel spreadsheet. The researcher created two sheets in Excel, so the data for each question can be organized in a separate sheet. The researcher put the stories' codes in order in columns while the variables (dialogues and adverbs) in rows. After that, the number of dialogues and adverbs inserted into the cells easily. This helped the researcher making figures that present the results clearly.

## ANALYSIS

This section presents the results of this study. It answered all the research questions that indicated at the beginning of the paper. So, the researcher classified the results below based on each research question.

### Protagonist

This part is provided the answer for the first research question, which is "How often do women and men authors classify protagonist as male or female in writing science

fiction short stories?" After careful reading, the protagonist gender for each story was evident. Table 3 below displayed the protagonist gender in females' stories.

As Table 3 shows, the protagonist gender was female in three females' stories and male in only one female's story. This indicates that the protagonist gender in females' science fiction short stories is usually a female. So, female writers in science fiction short stories tend to identify the protagonist gender as a female. Therefore, there is lack of consistency with previous research. Georgakopoulou (1995) states that nearly 76% of females' stories presented the protagonist as a man and Talbot (2010) stated that the protagonist in women stories is another person whether male or female. However, this research paper demonstrated that the protagonist gender in females' science fiction short stories is usually a female.

Table 4 below displayed the protagonist gender in males' stories.

**Table 1.** Females' stories coding

The female story	The story code	The code stands for
Omega by alicia waters	F1	The first female story
The birthday present by hillary lyon	F2	The second female story
Last chance by leanne styles	F3	The third female story
Roads by gracia franzen	F4	The fourth female story

**Table 2.** Males' stories coding

The male story	The story code	The code stands for
Mushroom clouds forever by david burkhar	M1	The first male story
The long wait by jordan altman	M2	The second male story
On the observation deck by peter merani	M3	The third male story
Plasma roulette by joseph pete	M4	The fourth male story

**Table 3.** The protagonist gender in females' stories

The female story	The protagonist gender
F1	Female
F2	Female
F3	Male
F4	Female

**Table 4.** The protagonist gender in males' stories

The male story	The protagonist gender
M1	Male
M2	Male
M3	Male
M4	Male

As Table 3 shows, the protagonist gender was male in all males' stories. This illustrates that the protagonist gender in males' science fiction short stories is mostly a male. Thus, male storytellers in science fiction short stories tend to identify the protagonist gender as a man. Accordingly, this pattern is consistent with previous research. Georgakopoulou (1995) indicated that a percentage of 91% of males' stories showed the protagonist as a man and Talbot (2010) showed that the protagonist is usually the teller or another male in men's stories. Similarly, this study emphasized that the protagonist gender in males' science fiction short stories is predominantly a male.

**Dialogues**

This part is provided the answer for the second research question, which is "How frequently do female and male writers use "dialogues" in science fiction short stories?". Throughout these eight science fiction short stories, I observed so many dialogues in females stories comparing to males' stories. Figure 1 represents the number of dialogues in each story.

Figure 1 indicates that women used dialogues more frequently than men in writing science fiction short stories. The first and the third female stories includes 19 dialogues for each story. The second female story contains 24 dialogues and the fourth female story has seven dialogues. Contrarily, first male story has only one dialogue and the second male story has no dialogues at all. The third male story contains two dialogues and the fourth male story consists 12 dialogues.

Figure 2 illustrates the number of dialogues in all females' and males' stories.

Figure 2 demonstrates that females' stories included 69 dialogues while males' stories had only 15 dialogues. For example, one of the males' stories has only one dialogue

"Suddenly a person he recognized as The President stood up with a sign that said, **"DO IT"**". Another example presents a short part of one of the females' stories that includes six dialogues: "***"I can offer you something better than water," I said. The man scoffed. "Out here there's no such thing."***" "***Please," I said, peering up at him, batting my eyelashes. Anything was worth a try. He shook his head. "My horse can't carry us both. My water won't stretch to me, you, the horse, and the baby."***" "***Fine," I said, "Then take my baby with you."***" This finding indicates that women includes dialogues more frequently than men in writing science fiction short stories. Moreover, this finding consistent with Talbot (2010) since she mentioned that women provide more detail on dialogue than men do.

**Adverbs**

This section aimed to answer for the third research question, which is "How frequently do women and men authors use "adverbs" in science fiction short stories?". While reading the stories, I noticed there are a diversity in using adverbs among female and male writers. Figure 3 below indicates the frequency of adverbs in each story.

Figure 3 illustrates that women used adverbs more frequently than men did. The first female story contains two adverbs while the second female story has seven adverbs. The third female story consists ten adverbs and the fourth female story includes five adverbs. On the other hand, the first male story has eight adverbs, the second and fourth male stories include three adverbs each, and the third male story contain only two adverbs.

Figure 4 represents the frequency of adverbs in all females' and males' stories.

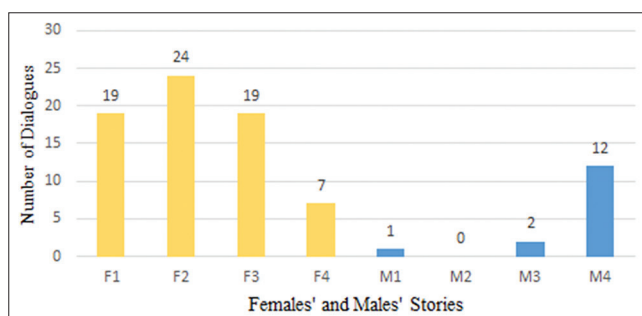


Figure 1. Number of dialogues in each story

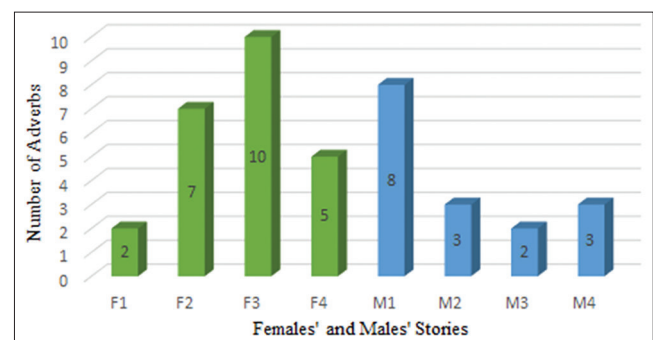


Figure 3. Frequency of adverbs in each story

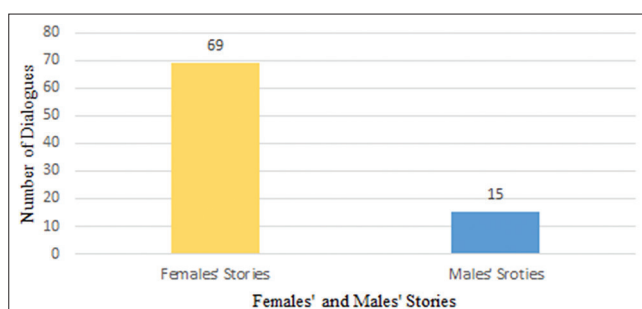


Figure 2. Number of dialogues in females' and males' stories

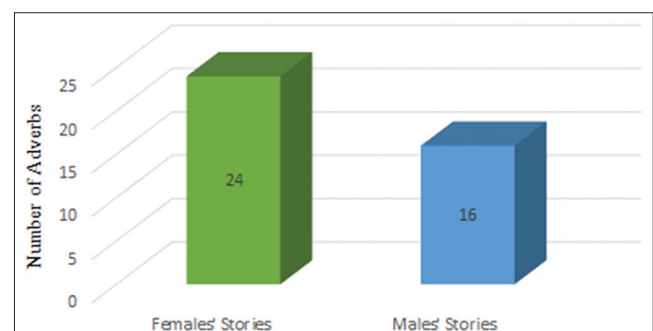


Figure 4. Frequency of adverbs in females' and males' stories

Figure 4 indicates that females' stories contain 24 adverbs while males' stories consists 16 adverbs. Thus, females use adverbs more frequently than males in writing science fiction short stories. Moreover, I noticed that females used soft and emotional adverbs such as, fatherly, softly, gently, slowly and carefully. Examples from females' Stories: "**Laying a fatherly hand on my shoulder**" and "**I love you Connie' Tandie said softly**". On the contrary, males used strong and practical adverbs such as successfully, firmly, weightlessly, terribly, and manually. Examples from males' stories: "**He successfully entered his thumbprint**" and "**Anderson firmly pressed the red fire switch**". This finding consistent with Page (2002) because he argued that women narrate their stories emotionally more than informatively. Also, male narrators get involved with information, so they conveyed factual information more than females did (Page, 2002).

### Story Conclusion

This part provides the answer for the fourth research question, which is "How usually female and male storytellers conclude their science fiction short stories (happy, sad, or disappointed ending)?" During reading the stories, I noticed that women's stories have more emotion and drama than men's stories, and this consistent with This finding consistent with Page (2002) when he stated that women narrate their stories emotionally more than informatively.

Also, I found that two of the females' stories has the sentence "I love you" while none of the males' stories contain that sentence. All females' stories have sad and disappointed ending. Males' stories have various ending between sad, disappointed, happy, and mestry. Table 5 shows the ending of females' stories.

Table 5 emphasized that all females' stories ended by the death of someone. Moreover, females' stories described the death accurately and emotionally. Some example are "**I withdrew a dagger from the folds of my blouse and plunged it into his throat. The shock of pain filled his eyes as he collapsed like a fallen tree, his blood flowing into the sand like the only river in the desert.**" and "**I looked over. Her eyes were open, but she wasn't moving. I nudged her gently. "Tilley?" She was gone. I burst into tears, burying my face in her chest.**"

Table 6 represents the ending of males' stories.

**Table 5.** The ending of females' stories

The female story	Someone died at the end
F1	Yes
F2	Yes
F3	Yes
F4	Yes

**Table 6.** The ending of males' stories

The male story	Someone died at the end
M1	Yes
M2	No
M3	No
M4	Yes

Table 6 indicates that two of males' stories ended by the death of someone while the other two didn't end by the death of someone. Furthermore, men's stories didn't describe the death emotionally or accurately. They simply said something like: "**she had died**" and "**Your friend is dead. He's dead. Dead. I hope you're happy. I hope you can live with this.**". This finding, also, consistent with Page (2002) since he indicated that women narrate their stories emotionally more than informatively. He, also, reported that male narrators get involved with information more than females did (Page, 2002).

## CONCLUSION

### Summary of Findings

- Female writers in science fiction short stories are tend to identify the protagonist gender as a female while the protagonist gender in males' science fiction short stories is mostly a male.
- Women includes dialogues more frequently than men in writing science fiction short stories.
- Females use adverbs more frequently than males in writing science fiction short stories. Besides, females used soft and emotional adverbs such as, fatherly and gently while males used strong and practical adverbs such as successfully and terribly.
- Women's stories have more emotion and drama than men's stories. Moreover, females' stories described the death accurately and emotionally.

### Limitations

There were two limitations of this study that should be mentioned. The first limitation was the number of stories. There were only eight stories that were analyzed in this study. Therefore, these eight stories may not represent the main features of female and male writers in science fiction short stories.

The second limitation was collecting data from one resource only. Since the data were collected from one website, the results may not represent science fiction short stories in books, magazines, or other online resources. Because of these limitations, the findings might not be generalized.

### Suggestions for Future Research

Since this study was conducted on one theme "science fiction", further research studies can be conducted on other themes such as drama. Moreover, further studies could be conducted on different type of narrative rather than short stories such as novels. Further studies could analyze more short stories. This would be useful for more accurate results. Since this study collected data from only one website, future research could collect data from multiple resources in order to get more accurate information.

## REFERENCES

- De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (2019). *The handbook of narrative analysis*. Wiley-Blackwell.

- Georgakopoulou, A. (1995). Women, men, and conversational narrative performances: Aspects of gender in Greek storytelling. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 460-486.
- Oggins, J. j. (2014). Underrepresentation of Women Writers in Best American Anthologies: The Role of Writing Genre and Editor Gender. *Sex Roles*, 71(3-4), 182-195.
- Page, R. E. (2002). Evaluation in childbirth narratives told by women and men. *Discourse Studies*, 4(1), 99-116.
- Rodgers, S., & Thorson, E. (2003). A socialization perspective on male and female reporting. *Journal of Communication*, 53(4), 658-675.
- Stockwell, P. (2003). Introduction: science fiction and literary linguistics. *Language and Literature*, 12(3), 195-198.
- Talbot, M. (2010). *Language and Gender*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Malden, MA: Polity Press. ISBN: 978-0- 7456-4605-3