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# Expressing Conflicts Semantic Patterns Typifying Letters in the British Press

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## *Abstract*

This study analyses the most frequent semantic patterns used in a corpus of letters published in the British press to express conflictual situations during the 1857-58 uprisings in colonial India. While the letters provided first-hand information of the dramatic events being experienced, they shaped the news and the readers' opinions by expressing uncertainty and anguish deriving from the circumstances which generated a sense of anxiety in the public. The analysis starts with a corpus assisted approach focusing on the relative most frequent keywords and their recurring semantic patterns related to place and the actors involved in the events. The emerging data are interpreted qualitatively through discourse analysis to highlight how meaning is construed in communicating dramatic events.

*Keywords:* Conflicts, Discourse, Letters, Newspapers, Otherness

## *Introduction*

Stories about armed conflicts, feuds, campaigns, great battles, glorified victories and crushing defeats have for millennia made up a considerable portion of popular culture, since it is part and parcel of our cultural inheritance, and [...] we have become accustomed to [...] stories [...] tempting us to side with the good heroes in their fight against evil. [...] By [...] reading the narratives about the struggle between good and evil, we are persuaded to take a stand in the conflict [...] and our sympathies and antipathies depend on which of the antagonists' propaganda strategists best gains access to our attention and emotional engagement, i.e., how we as an audience identify with the different parties in the conflict. (Nohrstedt 2009, 96)

The different parties involved in conflicts are understood, interpreted, justified and judged through their depiction (An-

dersen 2006). This affects most civilians' impressions deriving "not from the battles in distant lands but from the manner they are rendered at home" (xvi). As a matter of fact, alongside the fighting on the battleground, war has always been fought in all forms of information, in order to drive public opinion and the willingness to fight on the part of populations and troops (Taylor 1997, 119; Thussu and Freedman 2003, 7). As a consequence, the depictions of conflicts have always attracted a large audience, since victories and defeats are very dramatic and they often deeply affect the fates of many people by engaging them both emotionally and intellectually (Hallin and Gitlin 1994).

The properties of conflictual events or stories make such news highly newsworthy with the consequence of turning every form of information into a battleground in which journalists are drawn into the conflict, either voluntarily or under orders, or even unawares, as conflicts cannot be fought without public support. "Great efforts are therefore made to get the public to accept, and preferably, support their own side's actions in the conflict" (Nohrstedt 2009, 96).

During dramatic events there is a constant need of up-dated information, but in 1857-58 the modern notion of informational immediacy was still unknown. As Randall claims, news travelled by sea, letters required nearly three months to reach their destination and the electric speed of the telegraph was retarded by intercontinental delays which could take as up to at least six weeks. The telegraph, moreover, not only was not sufficiently fast in transmission but it was also notoriously spare in detail. This problem became, not surprisingly, a matter of journalistic complaint, since the 1857-58 news of the uprisings in India imposed itself as urgent and un-ignorable although none of the telegraphic messages from rebellious India contained a fair summary of what had actually occurred (Randall 2003). It was the arrival of the mail which, by contrast, contributed to receive details which provided a darker aspect of the disastrous situation. Letters thus acquired a pivotal role by communicating details, otherwise unknown, of the events occurring during the uprisings.

The letters which appeared in the British press were originally private, but they were made public to fill in news gaps (Samson 2020a). This, on the one hand, allowed the contextualisation of the uprisings; on the other hand, they underwent a re-contextualisation of their original private communicative context. In this way, the events are discursively represented within social practices that regulate collective interaction in what can be termed a multi-layered context. The concept, drawing on Pahta *et al.* (2010) and Taavitsainen (2018), involves both textual contexts as well as socio-historical conditions of text production with its societal, situational, historical, ideological and material sides including the writers' and readers' language attitudes and their social and situational context.

Research has mainly concentrated on letters referring to opinions, asking for advice in the Readers Letters page (Baczynski 1987), questioning the relationship between letters and the development of popular press (Bromley 1998), the function of correspondence sections in the provincial press and their reader value (Jackson 1971), the strong element of rituality in the topics approached in letters and their political influence (Tunstall 1977), or the editorial choices of letters (McNair 2000). In contrast, few corpus linguistics studies have analysed private letters written and published during the uprisings in India.

The purpose of this study is therefore to analyse the most frequent semantic patterns used in a specially compiled corpus of private letters written during the Indian uprisings in 1857-58 – INUPLE – and published in the British press. By adopting a corpus assisted approach (Partington 2004, 2009) integrated with a discursive interpretation of the data expressing the conflicts, the aim is to address the following questions:

- Which are the most frequent key words related to place and actors within the uprisings in INUPLE?
- Which are the recurring semantic patterns related to place and actors within INUPLE?
- How is meaning construed while shaping communication in INUPLE?

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: section one provides the historical political-geographical context in which the letters were written. Section two focuses on conflict letters in the press, section three describes the corpus and the methods adopted, whereas section four analyses the emerging data. Section five concludes the paper.

### *1. The context*

The outbreaks of unrest among the Indian troops marked the beginning of a crisis which in imperial terms came to be known as the Indian or sepoy “mutiny”, or as the first “national-popular imperialist war” fought by Britain in its Empire (Dawson 1995), or, in nationalist terms, as the “First War of Independence” (Blunt 2000). The causes of the uprising were and are still contested. For instance, Bhargava (1992) claims that imperial histories have tended to focus on the rumour that cartridges for new Enfield rifles had been greased with beef and pork fat. Having to bite into such cartridges before using them meant both Hindu and Muslim infantry soldiers, known as sepoys, were forced to break their religious faith. By contrast, most contemporary debates (Nielsen 2020; Dutta and Rao 2015; Bates and Major 2013, to mention a few) about the causes of the ‘mutiny’ focus on the organization of the Bengal army which was characterised by a widening distance between British officers and sepoys and the annexation of the province of Oudh in 1856. The year was characterised by intense growing disaffection among Indian infantry soldiers against the British East India Company which, till then, ruled on behalf of the British Crown.

In the following year, 1857, detachments of the Bengal army mutinied in the garrison town Meerut, 40 miles northeast of Delhi, killing several British officers and setting fire to the cantonment, before marching to Delhi and declaring the Mughal king, Bahadur Shah II, the reinstated ruler of Hindustan. Such actions have been considered consequential to the British deposing several noble Indians from their thrones without attracting significant support from the Indian population. By 1858, the revolts spread throughout central and northern India, taking place in Bengal by stretching across Delhi, Lucknow, and Cawnpore, as the rebels captured large tracts of the North-Western Provinces and Awadh (Oudh), where the ‘mutiny’ was also characterized by widespread agrarian unrest (Blunt 2000).

The key episode was the Cawnpore mutiny in which the East India Company forces and civilians were caught unprepared for an extended siege and were forced to surrender to the rebel forces under Nana Sahib, an aristocrat, in return for a safe passage to Allahabad. However, their evacuation from Cawnpore turned into a massacre on 27 June 1857 along the Ganges River as the 120 British women and children captured by the sepoys were killed in the Bibighar massacre. Their remains were thrown down a nearby well in the attempt to hide evidence, as the East India Company rescue force from Allahabad approached Cawnpore which was retaken in mid-July 1858. In order to re-establish the British law, the Company forces engaged in widespread retaliation against the captured sepoys and local civilians who had supported the revolt (Blunt 2000).

During the several uprisings in 1857-58, letters written home by women and men were published in the press, delivering the public with first-hand information and personal perspectives on the dramatic events taking place.

## 2. *Conflict letters in the press*

From the mid-nineteenth century, letters in the press were clearly demarcated from reporting, according to the ways in which they were produced, how the staff involved understood them, and how they presented themselves to the readers (Nielsen 2010). However, in the case of the 1857-58 uprisings there was a paucity of journalists on the ground, as a consequence those who wrote accounts of the events in their letters home became the first historians of the uprisings. In certain sections of the newspapers, the coverage of the events often consisted of reproducing stories from local papers (James 1996), questionable depositions, muddled accounts, dubious journals, the narratives of shell-shocked survivors (Ward 1996), factual accounts and surmises by worried people in troubling times. All of these accounts showed a surprising degree of good faith reliance in the reports of others, even when the atrocities were exaggerated and lacked any substantiating evidence (Ward 1996). Within such a system, reports could be biased, or a falsehood could be amplified without any real editing. As Ponsonby claims:

Falsehood, is a recognized and extremely useful weapon in warfare, and every country uses it quite deliberately to deceive its own people, to attract neutrals, and to mislead the enemy. The ignorant and innocent masses in each country are unaware at the time that they are being misled, and when it is all over only here and there are the falsehoods discovered and exposed. As it is all past history and the desired effect has been produced by the stories and statements, no one troubles to investigate the facts and establish the truth. (1940, 13)

The letters received from India were published to partially inform but mainly to produce reactions deriving from atrocity stories, real and invented, which generated a cry for vengeance. Letters enhanced the personal nature of information by providing impressionistic detailed narrations of the events while providing a sense of authenticity to the communication. A formal feature of the letters published in the press at the time is their intimate mode of address. According to Brant (2006, 176), familiarity was the price paid for that singleness of epistolary voice which dissociated the genre from the tenor of mass politics. Newspapers cultivated exactly this sense of personal involvement and identification with their readership (Warren 2000; Chapman 2013) through the adoption of a mode which promoted identification (Conboy 2010) and a sense of membership of a newspaper community with the 'I' and 'we' as key to market success.

Furthermore, the referential function of letters in the press represented a space through which personal viewpoints are transmitted to the formal sphere, thus turning personal gazes, perspectives, opinions into political and constituted public issues. Such letters have often been approached through the lens of a Habermasian (Habermas 1989) formation of the 'public sphere' (Garnham 1986; Hampton 2004; Dahlgren 2013). In such a perspective, 'civic engagement' is understood as an appraisal of issues which are pre-selected as of 'public' significance, sharp divisions are maintained between information (and information providers) and 'opinion', and an ideal of objectivity is used as a reference point, as argued by Cavanagh (2019). For Hampton (2004), this kind of approach is directly connected to a wider sense of public engagement, in that there is a close connection between individuals and the state with an ideal of politics by public discussion on the questions of the day that permeated mid-Victorian elite society with reference to the colonies. "For 'ordinary' readers, then, the space provided by newspapers allowed them to access what they saw as a broader and more legitimate sphere of power than those encountered in daily life" (Cavanagh 2019, 95).

However, when reports did not provide the required level of details of the uprisings, a newspaper would print private letters from India or, according to Wahl-Jorgensen (2004), con-

strue them through the co-creation of news workers and letter writers. As such, private letters from unmediated turned into highly mediated texts through journalistic routines, including those of editorial selectivity (Gregory and Hutchins 2004). The letters were characterised by the addressors' point of view referring to the events occurring while not only morally orienting readers with the newspaper's editorial position, but also revealing glimpses of how ordinary people made sense of major events and crises which were unfolding around them. The recurrence of such letters in the press positioned them at the centre of public interest which, on the one hand, led to public discussion on the questions of the day (Chalaby 1998; Wahl-Jorgensen 2007), on the other hand, gradually saw the rationally debating citizen as central in the creation of journalism of representation (Hampton 2004).

### 3. *Corpus and methods*

In order to analyse the linguistic features characterising the letters written during the 1857-58 Indian uprisings, I specially compiled a small specialised corpus – INUPLE – of 42,000 words. Small corpora are contextually well-anchored and enable careful “horizontal reading” and manual processing, as indicated by Taavitsainen (2018). This is an important advantage, as close reading provides a chance to reveal features which otherwise would be less obvious (Hiltunen and Loureiro-Porto 2020, 4), even though McEnery and Baker claim that “the issue of size becomes acute when one tries to use such corpora to explore words of what one might describe as moderate or low frequency; there is simply not enough data to make generalizations” (2016, 4). By contrast, large corpora contain higher frequencies, a broader range of genres, for instance, yet the results are not always possible to be re-contextualised, especially in corpora providing access to a limited amount of co-text and lack detailed information regarding other contextual aspects (Samson and Bös 2021).

In INUPLE, all the letters – 36 – were downloaded from the British Newspaper Archive and were saved in txt format. Table 1 lists the British newspapers<sup>1</sup> from which the letters were downloaded.

<sup>1</sup> “*The Morning Advertiser* was first published in 1794 by the London Society of Licensed Victuallers. It was devoted to trade interests, rather than to the support of a political party. Its circulation, however, fostered by the society, was, in mid 19th century second only to that of *The Times*. Founded in 1794 as *The Publican's Morning Advertiser*, it is the UK's oldest continuously produced paper. In 1858 the paper became the first newspaper to subscribe to Reuters' news service. *The Morning Post* was a conservative daily newspaper published in London from 1772 to 1937. Initially a Whig paper, it was purchased by Daniel Stuart in 1795, who made it into a moderate Tory organ. A number of well-known writers contributed, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb, James Mackintosh, Robert Southey and William Wordsworth. In the seven years of Stuart's proprietorship, the paper's circulation rose from 350 to over 4,000. During the 1850s, the *Post* was very closely associated with the Palmerston ministry. The paper was noted for its attentions to the activities of the powerful and wealthy, its interest in foreign affairs, and in literary and artistic events. *The London Evening Standard* was founded in 1827 as *The Standard* and it gained eminence for its detailed foreign news, contributing to a rise in circulation. *The Evening Mail* was launched in 1823, it proved to be the longest lasting evening paper in Ireland. The paper was an instant success seeing its readership hit 2,500 in a month making it, when few could read, and the only people who bought papers were the gentry and aristocracy, the city's top seller. Its conservative readership ebbed and flowed during the century. The *Morning Chronicle* was founded in 1769 by William Woodfall as publisher, editor, and reporter whose journalism slanted toward the Whig party in the House of Commons. *The Globe* was a British newspaper that ran from 1803 to 1921. During the 1820s it supported radical politics, and was regarded as closely associated with Jeremy Bentham. By the 1840s it received briefings from within the Whig administration. *The London Daily News* was founded in 1846 by Charles Dickens, who also served as the newspaper's first editor. It was conceived as a radical rival to the right-wing *Morning Chronicle*” (Samson 2020b, 64n.-65n.).

<i>The Morning Advertiser</i>
<i>The Morning Post</i>
<i>The London Evening Standard</i>
<i>The Evening Mail</i>
<i>The Morning Chronicle</i>
<i>The Globe</i>
<i>The London Daily News</i>

Table 1 – 1857-58 British Newspapers

The letters appear to have been private, as they were addressed to relatives in Britain and were prevalently written by East India Company army officials and their wives who followed their husbands across British India in the various cantonments, that is, military stations wherein they lived. Other letters were by missionaries and other unspecified civilians.

The methodological approach I adopted in this study is a mixed one. Firstly, by drawing on the principles of CADS (Partington 2004, 2009; Lombardo 2009), INUPLE is used for replicable quantitative techniques and I consider the quantitative evidence of the semantic patterns in the corpus as a point of departure which allowed me to identify the discursive functions (Partington *et al.* 2013; Mautner 2016) and strategies used by the letter writers in informing their addressees about the dramatic circumstances they were experiencing in India.

The analysis started by applying Word Smith Tools (WST) 7.0 (Scott 2016) to INUPLE, in order to generate a word list to then attain a key word list by comparing it with a Reference Corpus (RC), specifically, the Corpus of Late Modern British English Extended Version (CLMETEV) of 15 million words. This includes various text genres such as personal letters, literary fiction, scientific writing by men/women belonging to different social classes of 18th-19th century British society, ranging between 1710-1920.

Key words derive from the comparison between the frequency of each word in the INUPLE word-list with the frequency of same word/s in the RC word-list. A word is considered key in a keyword list if it is unusually frequent in comparison with what one would expect on the basis of the larger word-list of the RC (Scott 2016).

My key word choice was based on the assumption that the writers provided representations of the main places in which the uprisings occurred and of the actors involved in the events in their letters, that is, Cawnpore – as mentioned in section 1, the place of the major massacre in the uprisings – *sepoy*s, *we* – referring to the English. In referring to representation, I draw on Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery who argue that:

[it] implies a number of things. Its use is most commonly justified by underlining that, in any attempt to describe an event by a media outlet, there is no such thing as a single, natural pro-ordained way of presenting it, and since it is never possible to present a completely impartial, accurate and full account [...] instead the media offer representations of events. (2013, 3)

This derives from the need to prioritise particular events, as well as certain people's perspectives or opinions, over others'; therefore, any attempt at describing or even simply observing an event inevitably contains an element of interaction or even of interference (Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013; Partington 2015).

I investigated the recurring chosen key words in their collocational patterns, that is, the

tendency of words, or group of words, to occur more frequently in some environments than others (Hunston 2010) These phraseological arrangements are based on the assumption that words are not to be seen as elements in isolation that can be slotted into syntactic frameworks, but as forming larger units of meaning (Sinclair 1996; Römer 2010). Since the meaning of words lies in their use and use cannot exist in isolation, use can only be recognised and analysed contextually and functionally. I therefore see language in this study as the vector of continuous repetitions forming semantic patterns that is “sequences of words and phrases that may be very diverse in form and which are therefore more usually characterised as sequences of meaning elements rather than as formal sequences” (Hunston, 2008, 271).

These mirror the specific situational context of the uprisings in 1857-58 India that make the language unique to the particular environment of Bengal. I then integrated the quantitative analysis with a qualitative interpretation of the recurring data to foreground how the letter writers express themselves in representing the conflicts they and others are involved in.

#### 4. Data analysis

*Wordsmith Tools Version 7* (Scott 2016) detected 236 keywords among which the place name and different actors involved in the uprisings are listed in Table 2. In this, the first column shows the key word; the second, shows its frequency in the source text(s) – INUPLE; the third, the percentage of the frequency; the fourth indicates the number of texts it was present in INUPLE; the fifth its frequency in the reference corpus (the CLMETEV); in the sixth the Log likelihood statistic of keyness<sup>2</sup>; in the seventh the Log ratio statistic showing the strength of keyness and in the last column the p value, that is, the keyness value of the item under consideration.

Key word	Freq.	%	Texts	R C . Freq.	Log_L	Log R	P
CAWNPORE	56	0,13	14	4	722,60	13,49	0,0000000000
SEPOYS	49	0,11	18	11	598,54	11,81	0,0000000000
WE	480	1,12	31	1025	445,18	1,65	0,0000000000

Table 2 – INUPLE Key words – Place and Actors

The first key word is the place name, *Cawnpore*, followed by common nouns, *sepoys* and a personal pronoun, *we*, referring to the English who fought against the sepoys. Place-names are an important part of any geographical and cultural environment, since they identify geograph-

<sup>2</sup>Two statistical tests are computed: Ted Dunning’s Log Likelihood test, which measures keyness in terms of the statistical significance and is considered more appropriate than chi-square, especially when contrasting long texts or a whole genre against your reference corpus. Log ratio refers to Andrew Hardie’s emphasizing the size of the keyness as opposed to its statistical significance (related to the % DIFF procedure from Costas Gabrielatos and Anna Marchi but which produces smaller numbers and easier to understand). A value of 2 means the item is 4 times more frequent in the small word list than in the reference corpus list. A value of 3 means it is 8 times more frequent, and of 4 means it is 16 times more frequent. For further details see Scott (2016).

ical entities of different kinds and represent irreplaceable cultural values of vital significance to people's sense of well-being and feeling at home. A place-name usually exists in relation to a geographical object and the address function of place-names is fundamental (Andersson 1994). However, my assumption is that they also function at an emotive, ideological as well as at a community-creating level. An analysis of the collocations for each key word is a significant aid to highlight the various meanings a place name and common nouns acquire in a particular context as the Indian one of the time.

#### 4.1 *Cawnpore*

The recurring use of *Cawnpore* in INUPLE indicates not only a place on the map of British India but also its linkage with particular personal experiential and subjective meaning for the letter writers. It also foregrounds the need to name, label, identify and contextualise one of the Indian's most dramatic events. In addition, geographical names usually mean something that goes beyond a place's topography which tends to abstract and reduce the complexity of a topographic place to a single or a few fundamental traits representing irreplaceable cultural values of vital significance to people's sense of being (Andersson 1994; Helleland 2012). However, place names also function at an emotive, ideological community-creating level and an analysis of the key semantic patterns can significantly highlight the various meanings geographical territories acquire in representing the uprisings in colonial India.

Moreover, the relative high use of a place name shows spatial and locational awareness in the accounts of the uprisings and are not surprising since, as Knopf (2014) claims, geographic understanding, awareness and communication are key factors in military activities because they create spaces, places, environments and landscapes with references to a distinct moral order (Woodward 2005).

The Concordancer statistical counts per 1,000 words for the key word *Cawnpore* shows that it collocates with grammar words (*of, to, at, from*) stative verbs (*have, be*), private verbs (*believe, read, fear*), motion verbs (*march, send, reoccupy, come, make*), common nouns (*Euro-peans, massacre, time, road, tragedy, troops, guns, place, mutiny*) and few adjectives (*all, far*). The relative most frequent semantic pattern *of the Cawnpore* co-occurs recurrently with nouns (*of the Cawnpore+n*) as in excerpts (1) and (2):

- (1) It is admitted, on all hands, that Lord Canning is a dead failure, and that Bengal civilians cannot cope with the crisis. It is said that Sir Patrick Grant wishes himself back in Madras, as he finds he can do nothing here, being over-ruled entirely by Lord Canning, who will try to arrange everything himself, by Bird's office, now that everybody has heard *of the Cawnpore* massacre. [From online research it was found that the excerpt was taken from an article published in the "Inverness Courier", which does not appear in the list of newspapers used for this study] [My italics]
- (2) The movement has now taken a decidedly Mussulman character, and we have been within an ace of losing the empire, and I do not yet see my way certainly through the crisis. You have read *of the Cawnpore* tragedy? [My italics]



In excerpts (1) and (2) the pattern co-occurs with person markers (I, we, you, everyone) underlining the pervasiveness of subjectivity markers (Herring *et al.* 2004) encoding personal negative evaluations being recurrently expressed (*Lord Canning is a dead failure; Bengal civilians cannot cope with the crisis; being over-ruled entirely by Lord Canning; within an ace of losing the empire, I do not yet see my way through the crisis*) on the dramatic situation created by the mutineers as well as by the inadequate preparation, reaction and number of the English forces at the time in India.

While subjectivity contributes to the negative impressionistic views of the letter writers by pointing at interpersonal bonds which structure meaning, the repeated use of *you* reinforces a continued relationship between the letter addressor and recipient, as the question *have you read of the Cawnpore tragedy?* in excerpt (2) indicates. The strategy of speaking to the reader as if s/he were physically present is typical of language gap-closing (Fitzmaurice 2002) in letters wherein features of both orality and written language co-exist making them appear as a form of utterance which is not yet an unmediated conversation on paper while having the function of creating an interaction with the letter/newspaper reader, thus generating emotional reactions.

Furthermore, the narration of the events gives way to a shift of deictic centres in that the addressor prompts his/her interlocutor to relocate from the here and now of the act of narration to other space-time coordinates, namely those defining the perspective from which the events are narrated (Samson 2020b). However, since the letters were published in the press, they represent a case of what Ambrosi and Tessardo (1991) term as a secondary orality. This means that like primary orality (conversation) letters generate a strong sense of belonging to a community, although the latter is much larger and less clearly defined in newspapers than in primary orality. More specifically, *we have been within an ace of losing the empire* suggests the newspaper readership should be seen as part of the 'in-group' classification characterising colonialism (Samson 2020b) wherein certain traits are invested with social significance and attributed to or claimed by those whose group identity is thereby constituted. In this way, a set of logical distinctions become homologous to a hierarchy of social distinctions which is not only a system of signification, but also a structure of domination, according to Kress and Hodge (1979). The letters in the press, therefore, embody socially shared assumptions and practices that allow a high number of readers to construct their ways of being in society.

The second most frequent semantic pattern of *Cawnpore* is (*Cawnpore+v*), as in excerpt (3). The recurring pattern underscores motion which is a significant component of manoeuvres characterising the nature of military operations and conflict letters wherein narration is one of the principal means of building and communicating projective or viewer-relative locations (Ochs *et al.* 1992).

(3) *Cawnpore has been reoccupied* and I suppose this time Lucknow relieved by General Havelock. [My italics]

In (3) the pattern repeatedly co-occurs with cognitive verbs as, for example, *suppose*, which seems to function as a framework anticipating and encapsulating the evaluation taking place towards the end of the sequence. The framework related to a subjectivity marker + verb phrase (Bondi and Diani 2010) performs the primary function of unequivocally signalling the source of the evaluation, that is, the writer who, in this case, takes the responsibility for the implicit positive evaluation of General Havelock developed by the subsequent element of the sequence in *this time Lucknow relieved*. In this sense, the "framework" meaning element may be regarded as a form of self-attribution of the opinion expressed on an action. In addition, the evaluation implicitly refers to the expression of identity which is connected with the towns – Cawnpore, Lucknow – that entail perceived differences between 'us' (English) and 'them' (insurgents) occupying the towns.

#### 4.2 *Sepoys*

The *Sepoys*, were one of the main actors in the uprisings. Its semantic pattern *of the sepoy*s (prep+det+sepoys) is the relative most frequent one in INUPLE emerging from the Concordancer statistical counts per 1,000 words. Apart from the grammar words (*of, to, at*), stative verbs (*be, have*), action verbs (*come, guard, disarm, make, join, burn, leave*), cognitive verbs (*think, hope, pray*) and nouns (*regiment, army, night, morning*), *Sepoys* co-occurs also with determiners (*some, several*), pronouns (*they*), adjectives (*faithful, native, their, our*) and adverbs (*after, when, now*).

In excerpt (4) the pattern refers anaphorically to the person marker *you* which, on the one hand, establishes a continuity to the interaction (*Before you left India*) between the writer and the reader. On the other hand, it has the function of providing the addressors' personal first-hand point of view, while referring to the disaffection of the sepoy's, expressing evaluations related to being saved by the Providence, as well as the consequences related to the lack of an adequate number of men to save them. The writer's critical view underlines how the dangerous situation the English were experiencing was deriving from an underestimation on the part of the government. The letter, then, has the purpose of attempting to raise the public's, and the government's attention to the matter.

- (4) Before you left India, we had begun to discuss the disaffection *of the Sepoys*, but scarcely anticipated the scenes that were so shortly to occur. We have hitherto been saved a fortuitous occurrence of many unexpected circumstances, or by their occurrence being over-ruled by a kind Providence. But for the fact of no native power having yet risen—but for the Punjab having kept quiet—but for the handful of men returning from Persia, and going to China, whom we have got, might very likely, by this time, not be in Calcutta. [My italics]

In contrast, in excerpt (5) the pattern is recurrently followed by a verb (*of the Sepoys+v*) and it is used in an impersonal formal tenor referring to the punishments the rebels were to undergo after having instigated the population to uprising. The letter with its details indicating an Act which was passed has the function of publicly indicating the capacity of the English to restore their supremacy over the rebels and the reacquisition of power by hanging or confiscating the property of those involved in some way in the uprisings:

- (5) When it was known that the mutiny *of the Sepoys* had been followed in many places by rebellion of the populace Act. No. XI. 1H57 was passed. By this law persons guilty of rebellion or waging war against the Queen or the government, or aiding and abetting therein, were rendered liable to the punishment of death, and to the forfeiture of all their property. [My italics]

The semantic pattern is also linked to a different perspective of the sepoy's. For instance, in excerpt (6) the most frequent semantic pattern (*p+of the Sepoys*) collocates with prepositions which refer anaphorically to a cognition evaluation that is developed through a personal mental process. The person marker anticipates and encapsulates the evaluation (*no treachery to fear*) that cataphorically refers to safety of the English in the area:

- (6) I think we have no treachery to fear, either on the part *of the sepoy*s or of the citizens of this place. [My italics]

Similarly, in excerpt (7) the pattern (*det+of the Sepoys*) becomes the entity evaluated (*were faithful*) by the addresser in his/her narration and it acquires a positive connotation by referring

cataphorically to the adjective (*faithful*) and the active verbs (*cut a hole, took her out*), thus providing a partially positive realistic view of the mutiny in which not all the sepoys were against the English:

- (7) Some *of the Sepoys* in her husband's regiment were faithful and cut a hole in the wall and took her out. [My italics]

The different angle of the sepoys emerging in the letters might be considered an editorial strategy which attempts to morally orient readers with the newspaper's editorial position, while appearing as a space available to a variety of perspectives on the same topic and revealing glimpses of how ordinary people made sense of major events and crises unfolding around them. In line with this, and unlike the previous examples, the pattern (*the Sepoys+v*) is related to the narration characterised by a succession of active verbs (*give up, came, driven out, smothered*) and mental ones (*think, remember, obliged, tired*) wherein the addresser by the use of person markers provides an impressionistic perspective of the event. This has simultaneously a referential and expressive function provided by the representation offered in excerpt (8) wherein the difficulties and dangers caused by the rebellious Sepoys are increased by harsh weather conditions:

- (8) Next morning at day light *the Sepoys were asked* to give up their arms, but only about 100 came, first in the evening some more came, and the rest were driven out of the station. I think that was the longest day I ever remember. Were all very tired, and obliged to indoors because the a dust storm that came on, which nearly smothered us. [My italics]

#### 4.3 We

The semantic pattern emerging from the Concordancer statistical counts per 1,000 words for the key word *we* is (*we+v*) which collocates, for instance, with stative verbs (*have, be*), mental verbs (*believe, think, favour, hear*), dynamic verbs (*leave, arrive, proceed, drive, march, land, meet, go, mutiny, make, send, shell, follow, dispatch, provide*), adjectives (*deep, constant, busy, European*), nouns (*ladies, soldiers, men, stations, shirts, letters*). The use of the person marker *we* indicates a change in the writers' perspective which is mainly focussed on the personal lives and feelings of the English experiencing the uprisings. Moreover, the pattern *we have had* is linked, in excerpt (8), to the delays in the mail from home/England which generates deep sadness in the letter writer who thinks of the anxiety generated in those at home not receiving information from India (*made me feel quite bewildered; many sad hearts and homes*) while evaluating the present situation as highly uncertain (*the whole of Bengal is in such an un-settled state; one cannot see an end to our trouble; no one can tell when or where a fresh disturbance may break out*) in Bengal:

- (9) To-day *we have had* a quantity of English letters, the first *we have had* for six months. The very sight of them made me feel quite bewildered, and I have not yet been able to read more than one. I need not say how much I have thought of you all — how many; many sad hearts and homes there must be in England just now; and really at present one cannot see an end to our troubles. The whole of Bengal is in such an un-settled state that no one can tell when or where a fresh disturbance may break out. [My italics]

The repeated use of the person marker *I* underlines not only the dialogic tenor of the letter but also the state of anxiety deriving from the lack of news in excerpt (8). Similarly in

excerpt (9), a letter written to a sister highlights the close relationship between the two while the subjectivity contributes to construe the addressor's negative impressionistic views (*nothing has come to me as yet; it has been miscarried; troublesome times*) of the situation in India. Moreover, by pointing at interpersonal bonds which structure meaning, the repeated use of *you* and *I* reinforces a continued relationship between the letter addressor and recipient, as the rhetorical question suggests at the end of the text:

- (10) My Dear Sister - I have been looking out this last four months for a letter from you, acknowledging the last money I sent; but nothing has come to me as yet, and so I have been left to think that it has been miscarried by the troublesome times, which *we have had* for the last four months, and which no doubt you must have heard of long before this must reach you. [My italics]

The same pattern is also linked to expressing a negative evaluation towards the Indians who are considered fatalists, that have the courage to kill only after taking drugs which are then used as a justification for their atrocities. The Brahmins are considered the worst in doing so. This negative judgement derives from the negation, on the part of the Indians, of the fundamental, axiomatic beliefs which underlie the norms and values shared by the English group. These aspects are reinforced by the consideration that *We have had too many of them in our regiments* indicating the need for a downsizing of particular Indian military members; on the other hand, *we* refers to the English, their reaction to the Indian as well as to the sense of superiority of the English. This implies the latter are stronger in character even without the consumption of drugs, and it projects an emotive, community-creating level meaning while fighting the "other", that is the mutineers, as indicated in excerpt (11):

- (11) Fatalism is the great mover in the disposition of the native lie that runs mad, being naturally easily excited, adds bhang and other drugs to work up the system, and then says 'it is all fate that did it,' and thus consoles himself for committing the greatest atrocities. The Brahmins are the Jesuits of India; their lying and dissimulation beat anything you imagine. *We have had* too many of them in our regiments. [My italics]

The sense of belonging to the English community fighting against the mutineers emerges also in the repeated co-occurrence of the pattern (*we+v*) in the narration of the English women preparing flannel shirts for the European soldiers in Delhi. The pattern collocates mostly with static (*be*) and intellectual verbs which are not observable (*animate, hope, expect, dissuade, tell, say*). Furthermore the addressor expresses his/her point of view alluding to the intrinsically spatial and limited character of the perceptual experience which is founded on the bodily existence and location of the perceiver in relation to the phenomena, that is the activity of the women helping the troops fighting against the insurgents. Their situation is defined by Levelt (1996) as the intrinsic or object centred frame or vantage point, that is, the location from which a situation is observed and described, or the origin of the reference (*ibidem*), as can be seen in excerpt (12):

- (12) *We have been* very busy for the last week making flannel shirts to send to the European soldiers at Delhi. Our party were much more animated by a Crimean spirit than some others who thought Government ought to provide such necessary articles; but, in spite of opposition, one hundred were despatched from Simla yesterday, and we hope to send double that number on Tuesday. It was expected that the ladies of several stations would

unite in the undertaking, and I wrote to a friend to interest the Lahore ladies in it. She tells me that they are all most willing to do any thing in their power; but the gentlemen dissuade them from it, saying the –them. [My italics]

### *Concluding Remarks*

The key words – *Cawnpore*, *sepoys* and *we* – and their recurring patterns used in the letters published in the British press, during the 1857-58 uprisings in India, construe meaning through writer-reader interaction which provides what seems to be first-hand details of the dramatic life the English were experiencing. Most of the information in the letters is typified by the constant explicit or implicit writers' evaluations of the incidences and the activities of the English in the course of the uprisings. Such personal perspectives have the function of generating familiarity and emotions in the readers while contributing to shape their views on the matter and how the world around them could or should be perceived. This foregrounds how the conflict letters in the press can be considered a situated activity and were written for a determined recipient and a specific purpose.

More specifically, the recurring patterns with their collocates and concordances have multiple functions. For instance, criticism by pointing at the lack or an insufficient number of military troops which were supposed to fight the sepoys and defend the English civilians, the military sites and the governmental institutions in India; indicating the underestimation of the circumstances on the part of the East India Company officers and the support of the local population to the rebels. In particular, the key word *we* occurs in semantic patterns which convey a constant sense of uncertainty, nervousness and deep anguish deriving not only from being far from home and family but also from the proximity to extreme danger and death. These feelings frequently emerge from the letters that most likely generated anxiety in the English newspapers' readership.

Furthermore, the letters appear to have a limited referential function as they are mostly expressive, in that their purpose was to engender critical reactions in the English public towards the rebels as well as to persuade the government to adequately intervene by sending troops to India. Consequently, what appears to be the least mediated, the most open and democratic element of newspapers is, in fact, as mediated, closed and anti-democratic as other aspects in journalism' (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1989; Gregory and Hutchings 2004; Silva 2019). These conflict letters in the press can therefore be considered not an open channel of communication between individuals in a public space of rational, two-way debate, but a complex social space in which what might be private communication is mediated by the routine practices of editorial staff that selected, edited, and shaped them, according to space and time limitations.

Another aspect which emerges from INUPLE is the ritual communication of the letters which prevails on that of transmission. The former relies on its conceptual association with "communion" and "community"; it entails "the representation of shared beliefs" (Carey 2008, 18) which enables "the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful [...] world that can serve as a control and container for human action" (15), in this case, that of the English over the insurgents during the uprisings. The letters' communication produces what they are assumed to portray by recreating the world and re-inscribing the letter writers within a world sustained by consensus. Consequently, the recurrent reference to the dramatic events experienced by the English in specific geographical locations of India has the purpose of generating a sense of borderless community within which the colony and England are one.

Moreover, this sense of unity is mirrored in the sense of superiority and the demarcation between the English and the Indian insurgents, that is between the in-group convergence and out-group divergence, a social identification process in which an individual recognises him/herself as a member of a social group or a larger collectivity, this being a crucial feature during any conflict calling for political stance (Samson 2020b).

The analysis of the frequent semantic patterns has therefore foregrounded how these letters can be seen, on the one hand, as an effective way of engaging the public by shaping it to take one's side; on the other hand, as a way of legitimising the reactions and the decisions of the East India Company and the government to end the 1857-58 uprisings and restore control over the Indian colony. In sum, although INUPLE is a small corpus and the findings cannot be generalised, this study provides the ground for future corpus linguistics analysis of historical English texts while highlighting the crucial role of the press in influencing the public within conflictual contexts.

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