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## Inducing sympathies and antipathies

### A corpus-assisted analysis of letters from the 1857–1858 Indian uprisings in the press

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Conflicts have always been highly newsworthy. They receive massive coverage while inducing readers' sympathies or antipathies, depending on which party in conflict they identify with. By adopting a corpus-assisted approach integrated with discourse analysis, this study focuses on how, in a small corpus of letters published in the press during the 1857–58 uprisings in India, the most frequent keywords and collocation patterns represent the events. The emerging data indicate how language is used to generate emotive reactions towards the Indian rebels in the readership, while legitimising the East India Company officials' actions with the purpose of developing a sense of shared beliefs in an English identity across the empire by connecting personal concerns to a wider sense of public engagement.

**Keywords:** letters, press, uprisings, sepoy, ideology, emotivity, identity, corpus linguistics, semantic patterns, colonialism

#### 1. Introduction

Since the 16th century, conflicts have always been highly attractive and meaningful for news related to the accounts of sovereigns, the impressions of rival armies, the diverse strategies employed in battles and their possible outcome (Conboy 2010: 15). The events reported not only receive massive coverage but they also build an allure of ideas and beliefs, as Fowler (1991: 13) argues, for the reason that “news is not simply that which happens, but that which can be regarded and presented as newsworthy”. In other words, it is worth conveying information when it is considered interesting for its details and for the impact it can have on people's lives, even when it is of uncertain quality, a feature which, according to Reah (2002: 1), often characterises the presentation of new information. Furthermore, these aspects lead newspaper readers and the public more in general to take a

stand in a conflict, since every form of information can disclose underlying intentions which are hidden behind their discursive construction (Sadeghi et al. 2014). As a consequence, on the one hand, news of conflicts becomes a battleground which cannot be fought without public support and into which journalists are drawn voluntarily or under orders. On the other hand, great efforts are made by the press to persuade the public to accept and preferably support their own side's actions in the conflict (Nohrstedt 2009). In such a context, the language used within letters published in the press can become an instrument of domination and social power considering that, as Wodak (2001), Fairclough (2001) and van Dijk (2001) argue, language is a suitable medium for covering and uncovering hidden ideologies intended to construct social norms and values. Specifically, ideology is defined by van Dijk (2006a) as a foundational belief that underlies "the shared social representations of specific kinds of social groups". In the specific case under investigation here, these are the us-group/the English, and the them-group/the sepoys/Indians. These representations are in turn the basis of discourse and other social practices.

The public's sympathies or antipathies are linked, then, to the discourses used to provide information, to the different parties the public identifies with and/or which ideological strategy and emotional engagement best gains attention, while the press becomes both the expression of public opinion and the indicator of contemporary history. However, in its dialogue with the public, the press turns itself into a great force that impacts on people's lives by half creating what it professes to reflect (Jones 2016), as in the case of the letters written and published in the British<sup>1</sup> press during the 1857–58 uprisings<sup>2</sup> in India (Samson 2020a; Samson 2020b).

The letters appear to have been originally private, in that they were posted by the addressors in India to their family members in England and can therefore be considered familiar documents. Furthermore, unlike most letters to the editor taken into consideration in extant literature, these were not written by high profile contributors responding to a specific matter mentioned either in a newspaper article, editorial, a previous letter to the editor, or to initiate a new conversation on a publicly relevant topic (Martini 2022; Brownlees, Del Lungo & Denton

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1. In the journalistic representations of the uprisings, the diverse British identities are subsumed into the imperial identity 'English'. However, when referring to the newspapers published at the time in England, Scotland and Ireland I use the contemporary inclusive adjective British.

2. I refer to the 1857–58 events with the generic term 'uprising/s' as historians still cannot agree on a definite way to designate the occurrences and 'mutiny' is a Victorian label which now is generally not accepted.

2010). By contrast, the private letters analysed in this study were often published in British newspapers to fill in news gaps (Samson 2020a) as, on the one hand, they contextualised the uprisings by providing first-hand information and, on the other hand, they underwent a re-contextualisation of their original private communicative context. In this way, the events reported and described become discursively represented within social practices that regulate collective interaction in what can be termed a multi-layered context. The concept relates to Blommaert (1999: 5–6) who argues that:

Texts generate their publics, publics generate their texts and the analysis of “meanings” now has to take into account a historiography of the context of production, the mechanisms and instruments of reproduction and reception, ways of storage and remembering. The fact is that discourses...have their “natural history” – a chronological and socio-cultural anchoring which produces meaning and social effects in ways that cannot be reduced to text-characteristics alone.

A multi-layered context therefore 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, as Pahta et al. (2010) and Taavitsainen (2018) claim. In the letters, the events are discursively represented within social practices that regulate collective interaction (Pahta & Taavitsainen 2010), wherein everyday life discourses have also the purpose of maintaining an asymmetrical domination of relations with the public (Thompson 2013). Letters in the press thus may be viewed as a situated activity, since they were written for a specific recipient and published for a purpose, the assumption being that they would have generated emotive reactions towards both the depictions of the English undergoing the atrocities during the uprisings and towards the Indians uprising against the English, as a result of the discursive differences linked to the representational and ideological distinctions involved. Research has mainly concentrated on letters referring to opinions, requests for advice in the Readers Letters page (Baczynski 1987), letters and the development of popular press (Bromley 2018), correspondence sections in the provincial press and their reader value (Jackson 1971), rituality in the topics approached within letters and their political influence (Tunstall 1977), or the editorial choices of letters (McNair 2000).<sup>3</sup> In contrast, few corpus-linguistics studies have analysed letters written and published during the uprisings in India (Samson 2020a; Samson 2020b; Samson 2022). As a result, the aim of this study is to extend the present literature by adopting a corpus-assisted approach integrated with discourse analysis of a specially

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3. On letters to the editor see also the chapters by Martini and Brownlees, this volume.

compiled small corpus of Private Letters Published during the 1857–58 Indian Uprisings (PLEPIU) in the British Press.

Specifically, this study will address: (a) the most frequent keywords related to places and the actors involved in the uprisings within PLEPIU; (b) their recurring semantic patterns; (c) the construal of discursive meaning while shaping communication within PLEPIU.

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

## 2. The historical, religious, political and geographical context

By the first half of the 19th century, the East India Company had brought major portions of India under its control, but it still had two purposes or aims, that is, to sustain its conquests and to exploit the country tradewise. However, the outbreaks of unrest among the Indian troops marked the beginning of a crisis which in imperial terms came to be variously known as the Indian or sepoy<sup>4</sup> “mutiny”, 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 uprisings 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 (Singh 2022; Nielsen 2020; Dutta and Rao 2015; Bates and Major 2013, to mention a few) about the causes of the ‘mutiny’ focus on the religious reasons linked to the English abandoning their policy of non-interference in the socio-religious life of the Indians and to the changes of several Acts which allowed many missionaries to enter the country and try to convert as many Indians as possible. Moreover, the English rule led to the breakdown of village self-sufficiency and to the commercialisation of agriculture which burdened the peasantry by adopting free trade imperialism from the 1800s, deindustrialization and the draining of wealth, all of which led to the overall decline of the Indian economy. Furthermore, the organization of the Bengal army was char-

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4. The term *sepoy* referred to any native Indian infantry soldier in the English military service at the time.

acterised by a widening distance between English officers and sepoy, the latter being required, for instance, to serve during the annexation of the province of Oudh in 1856, that is, in an area away from their homes without the payment of extras and the facility of free postage.

In the following year, 1857, detachments of the Bengal army mutinied in the garrison town Meerut, at the northeast of Delhi, killing several English 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 English 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 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 where 120 English women and children were captured and killed by the sepoy 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 English law, the Company forces engaged in widespread retaliation against the captured sepoy and local civilians who had supported the revolt (Blunt 2000).

The English were eventually able to suppress the uprisings since they were localised, restricted and poorly organised because the rebels lacked organisational experience and concerted action. By contrast, the English forces eventually recruited soldiers directly in India and received many more from England and other parts of the world, they possessed modern guns and rifles whereas the Indians were mostly fighting with swords and spears and had a limited number of old canons (Singh 2022).

During the uprisings, English women and men wrote home describing the dramatic conditions they were experiencing and trying to survive. Several of their letters were published in the press, thus providing the public with first-hand information and personal perspectives on the tragic events taking place.

### 3. Letters and ideology in the 1857–58 British press

By mid-nineteenth-century, the English had acquired a sense of immediate access to information as they were accustomed to receiving up-to-date news from other countries in Europe. This perception was intensified by the development of the telegraph, which contributed to the modern notion of informational immediacy. Unfortunately, though, the information system in India was characterised by delays in the construction of telegraphic lines, which meant the news of the 1857–58 uprisings took at least six weeks to reach Britain, thus not satisfying the public's expectations that required urgent and detailed information. The latter, on the contrary, was most spare of details, which in such a dramatic situation were crucial elements to be received also for journalistic reasons (Randall 2003). Furthermore, there was a paucity of journalists on the ground, therefore 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 shared a surprising degree of good faith in publishing them, 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, turning therefore the news into an extremely useful weapon to deliberately deceive or manipulate people in a situation of conflict as that of the 1857–58 Indian uprisings.

In such a context, those who wrote accounts of the events in their letters to their families in Britain became the first historians of the uprisings. The letters received from India had mostly a referential function but once they were published their prevalent function was to produce reactions in the public. The atrocity stories, real or invented, generated a widespread cry for vengeance, according to the editor's more or less manifest ideological intent. Thus the letters, which are characterised by a personal nature of information, not only enhance impressionistic detailed narrations of the events by providing a sense of authenticity to their communication but they also contribute to the reinforcement of collective national beliefs. These, drawing on Anderson (2020), are based on a sense of sameness deriving from a common cause of existence which is narrated to people who then identify themselves as part of the unity. The latter is further enhanced by an emotional understanding of integrity, sovereignty, and equality which could be referred to as national identity (Anderson 2020).

As a consequence, although the letters with their intimate, familiar mode of address and their singleness of epistolary voice contributed to dissociate the genre from the tenor of mass politics (Brant 2006:176), they were particularly cultivated

by newspaper editors for several purposes. For instance, their sense of personal involvement (Warren 2000; Chapman 2013) led to an identification of their readership with the newspaper which, in turn, generated the impression of belonging to a community (Conboy 2010), a true key to market success. Furthermore, the use of pronouns *I* and *we* may also be seen as an ideological strategy to construct ‘otherness’,<sup>5</sup> that is the differences between ‘us’, the English, and ‘them’, the Indians, at the time of the uprisings (see also similarly Cecconi, this volume). In the processes of othering, categorisation is pivotal and it is established by the dominant group that builds group boundaries and assigns subordinate characteristics to other groups by devaluing and demoting them to a lesser category, thus establishing a hierarchy, as Strani and Szczepaniak-Kozak (2018) claim. Such group distinctions are one of the main features characterising colonialism in which negative discourses are about the Other, whereas implicitly or explicitly all positive representations are assigned to themselves/the English. This hierarchical categorisation leads to the assumption that difference from the dominant group signifies weakness or subordination which is linked to what Billig (1973) describes as “ingroup favouritism” and “outgroup derogation”.

Moreover, such a strategy mirrors the rule of one collectivity prevailing over another, the life of the ruled being determined, for the sake of external interests, by a minority of colonial masters. The latter are culturally ‘foreign’ and unwilling to assimilate what is considered the exotic culture of the ruled majority, an attitude that was also underpinned by missionary doctrines based on the colonial masters’ conviction of being culturally superior (Osterhammel 1997; Pennycook 1998; Sommer 2011). This perspective is also mirrored by the use of personal pronouns that represent a source for comparison and contrast as well as serving more neutral purposes (Duszak, 2002), as van Dijk (2006: 123) argues:

all variable lexical or syntactic forms may be controlled by the underlying representations, as is also the case for the actions engaged in by the language users, as pronouns, among many other syntactic features, are perhaps the best known grammatical category of the expression and manipulation of social relations, status and power, and hence of underlying ideologies.

Private letters can then be distinguished from other types of discourse for their specific pronominal and linguistic features (Altman 1982), which reinforce interpersonal bonds and structure meaning while contributing to construe particular social settings and reactions. In these texts the addressee is charged by the addressor with present-consciousness in the temporal and spatial sense, forming what is named gap-closing, that is, the addresser speaks to the addressee as if s/he were

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5. Further details on ‘otherness’ are provided in Samson (2022).



physically present. In this way, the use of both orality and written language co-exist and generate an interpersonal involvement of the addressee while appearing as a form of utterance which is not a “conversation on paper” (Fitzmaurice 2002: 223), yet it reinforces the letters’ manipulative impact on its readers. Furthermore, the referential function of private letters in the press represents a space through which personal viewpoints are transmitted to the formal sphere, turning therefore personal representations and opinions into potential political and constituted public issues (Samson 2022). By representation, I refer to Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013, 3) who claim that:

any attempt to describe an event by a media outlet has not a single way of presenting it, since it is never possible to present a completely impartial, accurate and full account [...] instead the media offer representations of events [...] 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.

When private letters are pre-selected due to their ‘public’ significance and published, they enter the public sphere, in which sharp divisions are maintained between information (and information providers) and ‘opinion’, while an ideal of objectivity is used as a reference point (Cavanagh 2019). For Hampton (2004), though, 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 characterised by public discussion on questions of the day, which permeated mid-Victorian elite society. “For ‘ordinary’ readers, then, the space for letters in newspapers was seen as a broader and more legitimate sphere of power than that encountered in daily life” (Cavanagh 2019). According to Wahl-Jorgensen (2004, 68), though, British newspapers have a top-down and professionalised vision of public debate in mind which is inspired by liberal democratic theories encouraging readers’ participation only in the context of reception, thus public engagement is not made up of a great variety of voices outside the conventional news agenda. This means that most of the private letters in the press at the time of the 1857–58 uprisings might have very often been construed by the collaboration between news workers and letter writers when not written directly by news workers (Samson 2022). As such, private letters can be considered as turning from unmediated into highly mediated texts (Gregory and Hutchins 2004), while the addressors’ point of view on the uprisings contributed to morally orientate readers’ views and make sense of major events and crises which were unfolding around them. The recurrence of such letters in the press placed them at the forefront of public interest which, on the one hand, eventually led to a wide dis-

cussion on the Indian uprisings and, on the other hand, gradually saw the reader becoming central in what Hampton (2004) considers the creation of journalism of representation, in this specific case the representation of the English and the Indians in the 1857–58 uprisings in colonial India.

#### 4. Corpus and methods

In order to answer my initial research questions, I specially compiled a small specialised corpus of letters written during the 1857–58 Indian uprisings – PLEPIU – comprising 75,000 words. In a small specialised corpus the documents collected are domain specific, contextually well-anchored and they facilitate not only a careful “horizontal reading” but also manual processing that allows a close reading of its texts, as argued by Taavitsainen (2018) and Vaughan and Clancy (2013). These characteristics provide a chance to reveal features which otherwise would be less obvious (Hiltunen & Loureiro-Porto 2020: 4), even though McEnery and Baker (2016: 4) claim that in small corpora there is not enough data to make generalisations. Nevertheless, because small specialised corpora are monogeneric, their interactional processes occur in contexts which tend to be consistent and if they vary it might be in relatively predictable ways, thus allowing discourse analyses.

For PLEPIU, 57 letters were retrieved, downloaded and saved in txt-format from the British Newspaper Archive without correcting the texts. The 1857–58 newspapers taken into consideration for their letters are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** 1857–58 source British newspapers

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The Morning Advertiser

The Morning Post

The London Evening Standard

The Evening Mail

The Morning Chronicle

The Globe

The London Daily News

The Sun

Armagh Guardian

Bell's Weekly Messenger

Cirencester Times and Cotswold Advertiser

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**Table 1.** *(continued)*


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Clare Journal and Ennis Advertiser
The Daily Telegraph
Inverness Courier
Ormskirk Advertiser
Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette
Connaught Watchman
Leigh Post
The Examiner and Times
Edinburgh Evening Courant
Cork Constitution
Dundee Courier
Elgin Courier
Northern Standard

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As mentioned, the letters published in the newspapers were presented as being private, since 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 unspecified civilians.

The methodological approach I adopted in this study is a mixed triangulated one. Firstly, I applied a corpus-driven approach in which the researcher is committed to the integrity of the data as a whole, and the descriptions of language emerge from the corpus itself (Tognini-Bonelli 2001; Sinclair 1992, 2004). This allows us to extract the relative most frequent word lists and keyword lists which surface directly from PLEPIU, without being adjusted to fit pre-existing categories of the analyst, by applying Word Smith Tools (WST) 7 (Scott 2016), a commercial software. Secondly, I drew on the CADS approach (Partington 2004, 2010; Lombardo 2009), which is hypothesis-driven and aims to disclose the discourse type(s) under investigation and uses corpora for replicable quantitative techniques and evidence of the semantic patterns emerging within the corpus by applying WST 7. The semantic patterns consist of the core word, the patterns associated with that word and a number of phrase types occurring with the core word which are, in spite of being diverse in form, consistent in terms of meaning (Hunston 2008). The analysis of the patterns provides the identification of the discursive functions and strategies through discourse analysis (Partington et al. 2013; Mautner 2016), which uncovers meaning that is not open to direct observation,

since language is used by making semi-conscious choices within the various complex overlapping systems of which language is composed. Thirdly, I interpreted qualitatively the recurring discursive patterns.

I therefore started my analysis from the word list to then attain a keyword list by comparing PLEPIU with a pre-existing Reference Corpus (RC), the Corpus of Late Modern English Extended Version (CLMETEV) of 15 million words. The latter includes various text genres such as personal letters, literary fiction, scientific writing by men/women belonging to different social classes of 18th-19th century English society, ranging between 1710–1920. Keywords derive from the comparison between the frequency of each word in the PLEPIU 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 keyword choice from the list generated by WST 7 was driven by the hypothesis that the letters, while foregrounding the representations of the uprisings, repeatedly referred to place names where the uprisings were occurring and the English and Indian actors involved in the events, as the attempt of the press was to provoke reactions in the newspaper readers. Specifically, *Cawnpore*, as mentioned in Section 1, was the place in which the major massacre of women and children took place during the uprisings and it represented not only the severity of the imperial conflict to their countrymen and women both in Britain and India but it also contributed to destabilise the inviolability of a white, Christian femininity. As Blunt (2000) claims, *Cawnpore* symbolises the imperial crisis as a civil war while revealing the inseparability of national and imperial power, honour, and prestige. *Sepoys* refer to the Indian uprising soldiers and their actions were associated, according to Victorian values, to a debasement of masculinity, pride and honour; *we* refers to the macro-term ‘English’ which encodes multiple referents such as the addressor and addressee/s of the letters, the governors, officers and troops of the East India Company, the English civilians in India at the time, while denoting a sense of colonial community extended to the metropolis.

I investigated the recurring chosen keywords in their collocational patterns, that is, the tendency of words, or groups 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 were involved in, in order to induce sympathies and/or antipathies within the public.

## 5. Analysis

Wordsmith Tools 7 (Scott 2016) detected 364 keywords according to their frequency in the corpus compared to the RC. I then applied the CADS hypothesis-driven approach in choosing the words which denote the uprisings and the two actors involved, as explained in Section 4 above and listed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** PLEPIU keywords – place name and actors

Keyword	Freq.	%	Texts	RC. Freq.	Log_L (LL)	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

In Table 2, the first column shows the keyword; the second, shows its frequency in the source text(s), i.e. PLEPIU; the third, the percentage of the frequency; the fourth indicates the number of texts it was present in PLEPIU; the fifth its frequency in the reference corpus (CLMETEV); in the sixth the Log likelihood (LL) statistic of keyness, that is to say, their significance in PLEPIU; 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.

The first keyword in Table 2 is the place name, *Cawnpore* (Freq. 56; LL. 722,60), followed by the common noun, *sepoys* (Freq. 49; LL. 598,54) and the personal pronoun, *we* (Freq. 480; LL. 445,18), referring to the English who fought against the sepoys. The keyness of the words suggests a strong demarcation of ‘otherness’ in the letters and an analysis of the collocations for each keyword will aid to highlight the various meanings a place name, common noun and pronoun acquire in the letters at the time of the uprisings.

## 5.1 Cawnpore

The recurring use of *Cawnpore* in PLEPIU indicates not only a place on the map of British India, that is a geographical entity but also its linkage with particular personal experiential and subjective meanings for the letter writers. It also foregrounds the need to name, label, identify and contextualise one of the uprisings' most dramatic events, the *Cawnpore* massacre of women and children, as previously mentioned. 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). The relative frequent use of *Cawnpore*, in this case, shows spatial and locational awareness in the accounts of the uprisings and it is 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), which the uprisers had breached.

The Concordancer statistical counts per 1,000 words for keyword *Cawnpore* shows its relative most frequent semantic pattern (*of the Cawnpore* + n) collocates with grammar words (*of, to, at, from*), stative verbs (*have, be*), mental verbs (*believe, read, fear*), motion verbs (*march, send, reoccupy, come, make*), common nouns many of which have a negative and emotive connotation (*Europeans, massacre, time, road, tragedy, troops, guns, place, mutiny*) and few adjectives (*all, far*), 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*.  
(*The Examiner and Times* 1857)
- (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*?  
(*Inverness Courier* 1857)

Excerpt (1) is marked by the recurrence of non-personal third person point of view (*it is admitted that; it is said that*), which the encoder combines with the temporal point of view of the present tense group including the future (Werlich 1983) that provides not only cohesion to the narration but it also distances the encoder from the text wherein the object is the topic. Moreover, although the passive is used to foreground the succession of phenomena this is, nevertheless, char-

acterised by evaluation. Hunston and Thompson (2000: 5) define evaluation as a “broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about” and Bednarek (2010) claims that evaluation typifies news discourse since it reflects ‘news values’ (Bell, 1991; Brighton and Foy, 2007) and construes relationships with readers while structuring the news texts. Excerpt (1) is particularly loaded with negative emotivity (*Lord Canning is a dead failure; Bengal civilians cannot cope with the crisis; Sir Patrick Grant wishes himself back in Madras, as he finds he can do nothing here, being over-ruled entirely by Lord Canning*) which underlines the dramatic situation by implementing the generic pronoun (*everybody*) to indicate the widespread impact on the public in England as well as in other regions of India not involved in the uprisings.

In contrast, excerpt (2) is pervaded by the use of person markers (*I, we, you*) underscoring its subjectivity outlined by personal negative evaluations being recurrently expressed (*within an ace of losing the empire, do not yet see my way through the crisis*) on the dramatic situation created by the sepoys 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 indicated by the repeated reference to the *Cawnpore* massacre in both examples, and in (2) in the question *you have read of the Cawnpore tragedy?*, wherein *you* has the function of addressing directly the reader and generating rage towards the dramatic situation in which the English women and children were trapped and killed. Such representations have the purpose of reinforcing a sense of belonging to a specific social group in India as well as in England. Moreover, the strategy of speaking to the reader as if s/he were physically present is typical of language gap-closing (Fitzmaurice 2002) with the function of creating an interaction with the letter/newspaper reader, thus increasing emotional reactions.

Furthermore, the narration of the events gives way to a shift of deictic centres while 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), thus leading to what Ambrosi and Tesserdo (1991) term *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 the discourse of 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 ideological assumptions and practices that allow a high number of readers to construct their ways of being related in society and belonging to a specific identity.

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. (Evening Mail 1857)

As in (3) the pattern repeatedly co-occurs with mental verbs, *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 & Diani 2015) 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 this case *reoccupied* and *relieved*. 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 taking possession of the two towns by defeating the sepoys/them occupying the towns.

## 5.2 Sepoys

The sepoys were one of the two main actors in the uprisings. The pattern of *the sepoys* (prep + det + *sepoys*) is the relative most frequent one in PLEPIU 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*), mental verbs (*think, hope, pray*) and nouns (*regiment, army, night, morning*), *sepoys* co-occurs also with determiners (*some, several*), possessives/pronouns (*they, their, our*), adjectives (*faithful, native*) and adverbs (*after, when, now*).



In excerpt (4) the use of person markers *you* and *we* on the one hand, provide a sense of continuity to the gap-filling interaction (*Before you left India*) between the writer and the reader which typifies letters. It has the function of providing the addressors' negative personal first-hand point of view, while referring to the disaffection of the sepoys and foregrounding the unexpected sepoys' uprisings (*scarcely anticipated*). The unforeseen event is introduced by the conjunction *but*, which indicates the lack of comprehension of the actual situation by the English and contributes to the newsworthiness of the text. Excerpt (4) has then 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.

(*Inverness Courier* 1857)

By contrast, in excerpt (5) the semantic pattern of *the Sepoys* refers to nouns anaphorically (*mutiny*) and cataphorically (*rebellion*), which are negatively connotated for the English, and it is followed by passive verbs (*of the Sepoys + v*) (*had been followed; was passed*), which point at the spreading of the uprisings and the established penalties. The letter with its details referring to an Act which had been 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. It also indicates a strong polarity between the in-group/English versus the out-group/Indians which is linked to mythopoesis, that is, the legitimisation conveyed through a narrative whose outcomes punish non-legitimate actions (the uprisings) and, in this case, implicitly reward legitimate actions (punishment) (van Leeuwen 2007):

- (5) When it was known that the mutiny of *the Sepoys had been followed* in many places by rebellion, the populace Act. No. XI. 1857 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. (*Northern Standard* 1858)

The semantic pattern is, nevertheless, also linked to a different perspective the writer has of the sepoys. For instance, in excerpt (6) the most frequent semantic pattern (compound prep + *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 the safety of the English deriving

from their highly opinionated self-confidence regarding their military capacity, even though outnumbered by the rebels who were considered nullities:

- (6) I think we have no treachery to fear, either on the part of *the sepoys* or of the citizens of this place. (*Worcestershire Chronicle* 1857)

Similarly, in excerpt (7) the pattern (pron + *of the sepoys*) becomes the entity evaluated (*were faithful*) by the addressor 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 uprisings in which not all the sepoys were against the English. Such a perspective highlights that the 'other' could also have a positive connotation:

- (7) *Some of the Sepoys* in her husband's regiment were faithful and cut a hole in the wall and took her out. (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 1857)

The different characteristics 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 impartial views on the same topic and revealing glimpses of how ordinary people made sense of major events and crises unfolding around them. This can be seen also in excerpt (8):

- (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. We were all very tired, and obliged to indoors because of a dust storm that came on, which nearly smothered us. (*Cork Examiner* 1857)

In the above excerpt, 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 (*I; us*), the hyperbolic expression and adjective (*the longest day I ever remember; very tired*) provides an impressionistic perspective of the event. This has simultaneously a referential and expressive function provided by the representation wherein the difficulties and dangers caused by the rebellious sepoys are increased by harsh weather conditions which contribute to generate a sense of anxiety in the reader.

### 5.3 We

The semantic pattern emerging from the Concordancer statistical counts per 1,000 words for the keyword *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, that is the in-group, experiencing the uprisings in India but with an impact back home in England. Moreover, the pattern *we have had* is linked, in excerpt (9), 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. (Leigh 1857)

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. Similarly in excerpt (10), 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 implied rhetorical question suggests at the end of the text, which switches to the pronoun *we*, thus underscoring the belonging to an English in-group in India:

- (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. (Leigh 1857)

The same semantic pattern *we have had* is also linked to expressing a negative evaluation of the Indians (*natives*),<sup>6</sup> who are considered fatalists, in (11), and 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 colonial propaganda according to which the Indians were weak, effeminate and unfit to rule themselves. Consequently, they negated the fundamental, axiomatic beliefs which underlay the norms and values shared by the English who considered themselves superior because of possessing positive qualities as, for instance, a stronger character even without the consumption of drugs. Such an attitude is reinforced by the demarcation between the Indians/out-group and the English/in-group by the use of *we* and *them* in the same sentence *We have had too many of them in our regiments*, while indicating the need for a downsizing of particular Indian military members because they were judged unfit. Such a representation projects an emotive, community-creating level meaning while manipulating the readers and legitimising the English fighting the ‘other’, that is the insurgents, as indicated in excerpt (11):

- (11) Fatalism is the great mover in the disposition of the native 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. (Connaught Watchman 1858)

The sense of belonging to the English/in-group emerges also in excerpt (12), although in a critical tenor:

- (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 1 wrote to a friend to interest the Lahore ladies in it. She tells me that they are all most willing to do anything in their power; but the gentlemen dissuade them from it. (Inverness Courier 1857)

In the above excerpt, the repeated co-occurrence of the semantic pattern (*we + v*) in the narration of the English women preparing flannel shirts for the European soldiers in Delhi collocates mostly with static (*be*) and mental verbs (*animate*;

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6. See Samson (2021) for further details on the use of *natives*.

*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 a vantage point, that is, the location from which a situation is observed and described, or the origin of the reference. The women thus highlight the contrasting critical attitudes within the English community itself towards helping their troops while implicitly referring to the incompetence of some senior officers, the disorganization of the army administration and the unprepared English government, as during the Crimean war a few years earlier. During that war, the soldiers suffered appalling conditions caused by poor medical facilities, inadequate clothing and equipment just as in India. The letter therefore has the function of developing awareness in the English readers while indirectly inviting the English government to intervene in India.

## 6. Concluding remarks

The keywords — *Cawnpore, sepoy and we* — and their recurring semantic patterns used in the letters published in the English 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 recurring function of generating a sense of demarcation between the English/in-group and the Indians/out-group by building strong emotions in English readers who feel powerless, being far from the context of the uprisings, while the letters contribute to shape their views on the matter and on how the world around them could or should be perceived. This underscores how the letters were written for a determined recipient and published for the specific purpose of manipulating the public, in order to reinforce the colonial discourse.

Moreover, the keywords with their recurring collocates have multiple ideological functions. They shape criticism towards the East India Company and the English government, for instance, by pointing at the lack or an insufficient number of military troops which were supposed to fight the sepoy, defend the English civilians, the military sites and the governmental institutions in India, but had instead underestimated the circumstances. In particular, the keyword *we* occurs in semantic patterns which convey a constant sense of uncertainty, nervousness

and deep anguish deriving from those eyewitnessing their poor conditions, their being far from home and experiencing the proximity to extreme danger and death. These feelings frequently emerge from the letters that were most likely to generate the same sense of anxiety in the English newspapers' readership.

Furthermore, the letters appear to be mostly expressive, in that their purpose was, through different voices/addressors, 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, mediated, closed and ideological. These letters in the press can therefore be considered not an open channel of communication between individuals in a public space of a rational two-way debate, but a complex social space in which what might be private communication is mediated by the practices of editorial staff that selected, edited, and shaped them, according to space, time limitations and for their specific editorial and political purposes.

Another aspect which emerges from PLEPIU is that the letters rely on their conceptual association with "communion" and "community" that entails "the representation of shared beliefs" (Carey 2008:18), wherein the press and the readers belong to the English/in-/us-group' with a clear demarcation of the Indians/them/out-group which is depicted by ascribing problematic and/or inferior characteristics to them. Such discursive processes not only affirm the legitimacy and superiority of the powerful but, as Jensen (2011) claims, they condition the identity of the subordinate and enable "the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful [...] world that can serve as a control and container for human action" (Carey 2008:15). Thus, the communication of the letters appears to be biased, since its purpose is to produce what they are assumed to portray by recreating a specific world and re-inscribing the letter writers within a world sustained by consensus.

In conclusion, the recurrent publication of the letters during the uprisings has the twofold function of inducing sympathies and antipathies in the newspaper readers while attempting to legitimise the cost of new troops and the retaliations against the insurgent sepoys, in order to re-establish the English rule over its major colony, and simultaneously encouraging shared beliefs in an English identity by linking personal concerns to a wider colonial/imperial sense of public engagement during the 1857–58 Indian uprisings.

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