"THE WHOLE OF BENGAL IS IN REVOLT"
A corpus based analysis of letters from the 1857-58 mutinies in India

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Abstract – Letter-writing is an ancient practice which has attracted the attention of literary scholars and historians over the centuries, since it has had a crucial role not only in facilitating the development of states and empires but also in destroying them. Specifically, the desire of exchanging and establishing information networks as well as to the complexity of feelings reflected in these texts have attracted much interest whereas the linguistic features characterising personal letters have received limited attention by corpora analysts. The purpose of this paper is therefore to extend extant research by investigating the linguistic choices made in a corpus of letters written during the 1857-1858 mutinies in India. The methodology is mixed. After a quantitative analysis of the key words, their collocations, their repeated phraseology/clusters and the clusters' recurring concordances, the emerging data is interpreted qualitatively with the integration of discourse analysis. The findings highlight how letters can be considered a hybrid genre in which the personal, the public, the historic and the social dimensions intertwine with reciprocal influence.

Keywords: Letters; corpus; mutinies; phraseology/clusters; corpus linguistics.

1. Introduction

It is no novity understanding the history of British engagements with the rest of the world through the written word, although there is a long-lasting debate on how that might be done. There are, in fact, some highly charged disputes over the study of the British Empire in India which are related to the question of writing. This is, according to many (Ogborn 2007; Tiffin, Lawson 1994, for example), closely related to the various interdisciplinary debates on the relationships between imperial power and the written word. Letter writing, in particular, has had a crucial role in facilitating not only the development of states and empires but has also helped to destroy them (Goodman 2005). For instance, in drawing up a letter everything expressed in it might be charged with a significance that transcends its practical use. This is related to letters being actually shaped by a complexity of feelings including the desire of exchanging information and developing networks which are reflected in the language used. Such specific features have attracted the attention of literary scholars and, more recently, historians, linguistic and cultural researchers. By contrast, corpus linguistics analysts have to date devoted only limited attention to the features characterising personal letters.

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to extend extant research by shedding light on the linguistic choices made by English subjects in a corpus of letters written during the 1857-1858 mutinies which broke out in India. More specifically, I start with a quantitative investigation of the corpus by focusing on the most frequent key words, their collocations, their repeated phraseology/clusters as well as the clusters' recurring concordances, in order to extend the patterns of meaning. I then qualitatively interpret the emerging data with the aim of highlighting the most frequently encoded attitudes of the letter writers

towards the events and those involved in them.

Furthermore, given the historical dimension of my corpus, I broaden the concept of context to include not only the co-text but also the contextual matters referring to the mutinies in the corpus, since in discourse social and situational factors are often intertwined. As to this point, I draw on Pahta and Taavitsainen's (2010) multilayered context concept involving textual contexts as well as socio-historical conditions of text production with its societal, situational, historical, ideological and material sides which include language attitudes. These belong to the writers and readers who form a part of the social and situational context.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: section two provides the historical background to the letters forming the corpus analysed in this study. Section three focuses on letter writing and letters, section four describes the corpus and the methodology adopted, whereas section five analyses the emerging data. Section six concludes the paper.

2. 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 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. These took place most notably 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 to bear 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, the 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.

During the several mutinies in 1857-58, women and men wrote home letters with personal perspectives on the dramatic events taking place, thus providing us with authentic first-hand information to be investigated.

3. Letter writing and letters

Letter writing is a very old practice and one of the most pervasive literate activities in society in that it crosses formal and informal contexts, as shown by a vast variety of letters found in most domains of life. As Goodman (2005) claims, the earliest letters were closely linked to the bureaucratic needs of expanding empires, but personal letters or familiar letters were not unknown even in ancient times. Indeed, letters have provided a means of expression for a vast range of social classes ranging from the elite to those outside the mainstream society while facilitating the development of states and empires, but also, it is suggested, helping to destroy them (Earle 2016; Goodman 2005).

Furthermore, the history of letter writing reveals that it is anything but a static process. It can therefore be viewed as activity rather than as product (Nevalainen, Tanskanen 2007), a form of highly context-sensitive, personal and social interaction; in addition, the shift of focus onto letter writing as an activity shows the extent to which writers are the agents responsible for the outcome of the process (Navalainen, Tanskanen 2007). Letters can, therefore, be considered concrete unmediated historical artefacts which are strongly rooted in particular contexts and form the hidden underpinnings of much historical research. They can be viewed as a social practice displaying the signs of a distinct environment in which they are embedded and conceived. For such features, letter writing has been analysed taking into account several documents belonging to different fields from different points of view, such as immigrants' correspondence (Dossena 2012), familiar, religious, political letters (Fitzmaurice 2002; Houdt 2002; Schneider 2005); professional exchanges (Shvanyukova 2020; Gesuato *et al.* 2019; Dossena, Fitzmaurice 2006); private and public communication (Brownlees *et al.* 2010; Del Lungo 2014), circulars and memos (Earle 2016; Pahta *et al.* 2010), war letters (Lawson 2019; Omissi 2016; Carroll 2008) which represent different genres that have gained meaning and significance from being situated in cultural beliefs, values, and practices (Barton, Hall 2000).

Letters as a genre have been investigated since the late twentieth century by socio-linguists, social historians (Auer *et al.* 2015) and literary scholars (Nevalainen, Tanskanen 2007; Dossena,Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2008; Palander-Collin 2010; Cottone, Chiavetta 2010; Daybell 2012, to mention a few). Altman (1982), for instance, asserts that letters can be distinguished from other types of discourse by their specific pronominal and linguistic features. In particular, the frequent use of person markers *I, you, we*, on the one hand, reinforces interpersonal bonds and structures meaning; on the other hand, the continued participation of a *you* generates a continued relationship between the addressor and addressee, who by answering the letter becomes the addressor, thus impacting on the discourse influenced by the addressor/addressee relationship. Dossena and Del Lungo Camiciotti (2012) claim that letters are characterised by temporal relativity, that is, the use of past, future and present constantly relative to the discursive present of letter communication.

The reciprocity between writer and addressee in letters is charged with present-consciousness in the temporal and spatial sense. This language of gap-closing, that is,

speaking to the addressee as if s/he were physically present is typical of personal 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" (Fitzmaurice 2002, p. 223). This leads these texts to be considered frail "light" papers as they contain temporary messages and seldom reach a printed dignity, since publishers usually invest in letters by writers, intellectuals or politicians (Marquillas 2014). Nevertheless, the interactiveness of letters has been seen as an excellent means to exchange views, convey factual information, make appeals, 'chat' with relatives and/or friends whilst becoming windows into the soul of the author. In this way, letters provide testimony of personal experiences and exclusive information on private and public daily spheres and allow us to identify and reconstruct the interactional use of language in the social contexts of everyday life.

To date, personal letters written during the many British Empire campaigns have prevalently received the attention of historians and cultural scholars. Roy and Rand (2017), for example, provide a historiographic and cultural reading of colonial campaigning on India's frontiers seen at the intersection of colonial culture and imperial military power. Cooper and Stoler (1997) demonstrate various ways in which "civilizing missions" in both metropolis and colony provided new sites for clarifying a bourgeois order. Fremont-Barnes (2014) explains through numerous first-hand accounts why the sepoy armies rose up against the world's leading imperial power. Hine and Faragher (2007) show how American women moving West in the nineteenth century wrote conventional letters home, filled with good wishes and narrative descriptions of travel, whereas Wlodarczyk (2017) provides a sociopragmatic analysis of the correspondence of the British Colonial Office pertaining to the colonisation of the Cape of Good Hope. By contrast, there is a paucity of corpus linguistic analyses of letters written during the 1857-58 mutinies in India for which this study attempts to fill the gap.

4. Corpus and methods

In order to analyse the linguistic features of letters written during the Indian mutinies, I developed a small specialised corpus – INMULE – of approximately 42,000 tokens. All the letters were downloaded from the British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/) and were saved in txt format. Table 1 lists the newspapers from which the letters were downloaded.

Morning Advertiser
Morning Post
London Evening Standard
Evening Mail
Morning Chronicle
Globe
London Daily News

Table 1
1857-58 newspapers.

The latter were originally meant to be private, as they were addressed to relatives in Britain. However, due to the slow or delayed transmission of news from the colonies, letters became the main source of information from which factual parts were extracted and published in the press. As a result, it is difficult to establish to what extent the letters

which appeared in newspapers had preserved their original version. However, their high value rests not only on their provision of first-hand information of the dramatic events taking place in India, but also on their so-called language of proximity, that is the informal language written to and spoken with spouses, children, relatives and friends which is a highly valuable source for analysing the language used at the time.

The letters 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. It started with a corpus-driven analysis which commits the researcher to the integrity of the data as a whole, and the descriptions of language emerge from the corpus itself (Tognini-Bonelli 2001; Sinclair 2004). In this way, the centrality of the texts forming a corpus is pivotal, as findings are directly derived from the corpus and not filtered through existing concepts that are supposed to take place. Furthermore, I used Wordsmith Tools 7 (Scott 2016), a commercial software suite, to generate a word list which, to attain a key word list, I successively compared with a Corpus of Late Modern British English (CLMETEV) of 15 million tokens/words including 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 INMULE word-list with the frequency of same word/s in the reference 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 reference corpus (Scott 2016).

I further investigated the recurring 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 2011). These phraseological arrangements or clusters 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 clusters which, in turn, form extended patterns of meaning. These mirror the specific situational context of the mutinies 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 the discursive attitudes of the letter writers towards the events and those involved in them.

5. Data analysis

5.1. *Key words*

Wordsmith Tools 7 (Scott 2016) detected 236 keywords which, although in part predictable, correspond to the relevance the letter writers attributed to them during the mutinies and are mostly related to:

- place and space;
- rebels;
- troops;

- arms;
- officers;
- casualties.

Specifically, the first relative most frequent key words are indicated by their ranking position on a 236 keyness scale in Table 2.

Key word	Freq.	%	Texts	RC. Freq.	Log_L	Log_R	P
DELHI	87	0,21	22	28	1.040,66	11,32	0,0000000000
CAWNPORE	56	0,13	14	4	722,60	13,49	0,0000000000
SEPOYS	48	0,11	16	11	587,82	11,81	0,0000000000
INDIA	84	0,20	26	1.287	499,21	5,75	0,0000000000
GUNS	73	0,17	21	1.135	431,80	5,73	0,0000000000

Table 2
INMULE keywords.

In the above Table, the first column shows the key word; the second, shows its frequency in the source text(s) - INMULE; the third, the percentage that frequency represents; the fourth indicates the number of texts it was present in INMULE; the fifth its frequency in the reference corpus (the CLMETEV); in the sixth the Log likelihood statistic of keyness[1]; in the seventh the Log ratio[2] 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 five relative most frequent key words of INMULE include place names (Delhi, Cawnpore, India) and common nouns (sepoys, guns). Place-names are an important part of any geographical and cultural environment, since they identify geographical 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 in addition to the cognitive level, they also function at an emotive, ideological community-creating level and an analysis of the collocations for each key word is a significant aid to highlight the various meanings place names acquire in a particular environment, in this case the mutinies.

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[1] 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 statistical significance measure which tells us how much evidence we have for a difference between two corpora without telling us how big or how important a given difference is. This emphasises the size of the keyness as opposed to its statistical significance (related to the % DIFF (procedure from Costas Gabrielatos and Anna Marchi (https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/51449/4/Gabrielatos_Marchi_Keyness.pdf) which produces smaller numbers and is 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).

5.2. *Collocations and phrasealogical/cluster patterns*

5.2.1. *Delhi*

I firstly applied the Concord programme of WST 7 to the key place name Delhi to access information about its collocations, an extract of which is shown in Table 3.

1	One officer at **Delhi** escaped with three shots through his hat.
2	my affectionate nephew, **Delhi** has been recaptured by our men.
3	the lodgings been filled up. **Delhi** not taken.
4	out of five regiments before **Delhi**, only 2,000 Europeans can be mustered.
5	infantry, who took the route to **Delhi**. They were attacked on the

Table 3
Delhi Concordances.

Delhi collocates most frequently with grammar words (of, to, at, from, in, toward), stative verbs (be, have), action verbs (take, march, force, assault, return, arrive, accompany, kill, move, fill), few private verbs related to intellectual not observable states (believe, suppose, know, fear) as well as with common nouns (shots, men, lodgings, regiments, infantry, officer, route, king, news, letters, soldiers, telegraph, corps, weeks, accounts, troops, mutiny, insurrection, infantry) and adjectives (bad, few, long, immense, European). The collocates suggest that the main concern of the letter writers was communicating the succession of the military events to their relatives back home in England.

Given that the meaning of concordance strings can emerge only if considered within a wider context, I consider it crucial to go beyond the above textual snippets by, on the one hand, considering them within their source text and, on the other hand, linking them outwards to a wider meaning context by analysing the patterns created by recurring clusters themselves. The latter allow to highlight the connotations which give sense to the phraseology of place names and common nouns in different situational contexts and to underline their uniqueness in INMULE as they are connected to the immediate foregrounding of military action occurring at the time.

For example, Delhi's recurring relative most frequent cluster *THERE IS NOW* co-occurs repeatedly with+*N/s* as, for instance, in excerpt (1):

(1) **There is now** <u>a large force</u>, about 15,000 men, <u>in Delhi</u>, and all long to hear of its fall.
Lord Lake took it originally with much less than half that number. Everything seems to
be concentrated with that view.

The existential *there* clause has the function of stating the existence or occurrence of a large force of 15,000 men, which is the notional subject of the clause as well as the pointing of the writer to a new element linked to the cluster (*a large force of 15,000 men*) that refers to the rest of the discourse. The information in the existential clause also includes a time adverbial (now) and spatial reference (in Delhi) which enhance the connection of the information to the context of Delhi, thus anchoring every dialogue in INMULE which otherwise would appear to be a loose collection of disconnected utterances.

In excerpt (1) deixis has therefore two functions: draw attention to the detailed high number of forces employed to make Delhi fall and be re-conquered by the British and indicate the distance from the current time as well as from current reality or facts. Moreover, the frequent use of the present tense has the purpose of foregrounding the

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immediacy of the first-hand detailed information (*much less than half that number*) of the way military forces are deployed while wishing the enemy's defeat.

The immediacy of the information provided is characterised by the writer's personal perspective which emerges in the basic evaluative sequence (evaluation + entity/process evaluated) as in excerpt (1): *a large force*, *all long to hear of its fall, took it originally with much less than half that number*, *seems to be concentrated* .

Another equally frequent cluster of the key word Delhi is KING OF DELHI. Although a predictable collocation, it foregrounds the economic and political importance for the British to conquer Delhi after a long siege and to capture its king for whom the rebels sought to reinstate the power of the Mughal Empire. The event is mirrored in the cluster which collocates with verbs (KING OF DELHI+V), specifically action verbs (*storm, overtake, hang, kill*) as, for example, in excerpt (2):

> (2) Delhi has been <u>stormed</u> by the European and other troops, and <u>fearful</u> retribution had overtaken the mutineers. The **king of Delhi** is <u>hung</u>; and about eight or ten thousand of the mutinous troops were <u>killed</u>.

In (2), the narration, i.e., action recording sentences in sequence is typified by temporal relativity, that is, the use of past and present constantly relative to the discursive present of letter communication that characterises the mix of written and oral discourse constantly used in such texts. These are loaded with a highly positive connotation referring to the English troops successfully winning back Delhi, although they are linked to the use of adjectives (*fearful, mutinous)*, nouns (*retribution*) as well as verbs encoding repeatedly occurring brutal actions.

5.2.2. Cawnpore

The most frequent concordance lines of Cawnpore, the second relative most frequent key word of INMULE, are shown in Table 4. The relative high frequency of the place name 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.
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1	From **Cawnpore** nearly all the residents made their way
2	So far, the **Cawnpore** mutiny had none of those outrageous features
3	the rebels are in three engagements, occupying **Cawnpore**, and capturing guns.
4	Sir Hugh Wheeler has been killed at **Cawnpore.**
5	things remained in town have quo, except that **Cawnpore** has been reoccupied.

Table 4
Cawnpore Concordances.

Cawnpore collocates with grammar words (of, to, at, from) stative verbs (have, be,), fictive motion verbs (march, send, reoccupy, come, make), private verbs (believe, read, fear), common nouns (Europeans, massacre, time, road, tragedy, troops, guns, place, mutiny), and few adjectives (all, far).The emerging cluster OF THE CAWNPORE co-occurs recurrently with nouns (OF THE CAWNPORE+N).

In excerpt (3), the cluster anaphorically co-occurs with person markers (*I, we, you*) that underline the pervasiveness of 'subjectivity markers' (Herring et al. 2004) in the letters which encode personal negative opinions being recurrently expressed (*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 by the inadequate preparation, reaction and

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number of the English forces:

> (3) We have been within an ace of losing the empire, and I do not yet see my way certainly
> through the crisis. Have you read **of the Cawnpore** tragedy?

Furthermore, while subjectivity contributes to the impressionistic views of the letter writers by pointing at interpersonal bonds which structure meaning, the repeated participation of a *you* reinforces a continued relationship between the letter addressor and addressee, as the question (*Have you read of the Cawnpore tragedy?*) in excerpt (3) indicates while foregrounding the extraordinary relevance the tragedy acquired in the news for several social, economic and political reasons.

By contrast, the second most frequent cluster CAWNPORE HAS BEEN REOCCUPIED repeatedly co-occurs with cognitive verbs (*suppose*) (CAWNPORE HAS BEEN REOCCUPIED +V) which seem to function as a sort of marker, or framework, anticipating and encapsulating the evaluation taking place toward the end of the sequence, as in excerpt (4).

> (4) **Cawnpore has been reoccupied** and I suppose this time Lucknow relieved by General
> Havelock.

Moreover, the framework – most typically, subjectivity marker + verb phrase (Bondi and 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 (*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.

5.2.3. Sepoys

The third relative most frequent noun of INMULE is sepoys, the Indian mutineers against the English. The top five most frequent concordance lines are listed in Table 5.

1	from which the bulk of our **Sepoys** come, and it is now the
2	ort William by treacherous **Sepoys** guard at its gates.
3	there are either disarmed **Sepoys** or none at all.
4	mutinous army of some 30,000 **Sepoys**. Four entire regiments of
5	artillery and ammunition, the **Sepoys** have made no stand against

Table 5
Sepoys Concordances.

Apart from the grammar words (of, to, at), stative verbs (be, have), action verbs (come, guard, disarm, make, join, burn, leave, pray), cognitive verbs (think, hope) 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) which differ from the previous key words, thus indicating a topic variation.

This can be seen in excerpt (5) wherein the most frequent cluster OF THE SEPOYS collocates with prepositions (OF THE SEPOYS+P) which refer anaphorically to a cognitive evaluation that is developed through a personal (*I*) mental process, as in example (4). The person marker anticipates and encapsulates the evaluation (*no treachery to fear*) that cataphorically refers to the safety of the English in the area:

(5) <u>I think</u> <u>we</u> have <u>no treachery to fear</u>, either on the part **of the sepoys** or of the citizens <u>of</u> this place.

In excerpt (6) instead the cluster sequence OF THE SEPOYS+P 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:

(6) Some **of the Sepoys** <u>in</u> her husband's regiment were <u>faithful</u> and <u>cut a hole</u> in the wall and <u>took her out</u>.

5.2.4. India

From the analysis of the fourth key word, India, a change in the perspective of the facts related to the mutinies emerges from the concordance lines in Table 6:

1	and other parts of North **India**. The presidency of Fort
2	the Hindoos in this part of **India**, and was also the scene of
3	enacting through North **India** have been appalling, and
4	the safest point in North **India**, and scores of European
5	supposed to know anything about **India** who were ignorant.

Table 6
India Concordances.

A closer look at the collocates of India shows a high frequency of active verbs that are unrelated to military actions (send, put, remain, write, discuss, follow), the nouns often refer to daily life (letter/s, government, company, part, news, saving, regiment, time, troops, East, task, things, soldier, sister, brother, North, convent), and the adjectives are generic (special, European) as the adverbs (very, recently). There is instead a frequent use of person markers (we, you, us) signalling strong interaction.

Furthermore, the top cluster THE EAST INDIA constantly co-occurs with a noun N thus forming the proper name - The East India Company - as shown in excerpt (7) – although predictable, given the context, is so frequently referred to by the writers due to its highly negative features.

(7) **The East India** Company had treated him with insult and injustice.

In example (7) The East India Company is closely linked to its deplorable actions towards the Indians, specifically the aristocrats as Nana Sahib, for instance, that eventually led to the beginning of the mutinies against the English. Moreover, the highly negative connotation of the Company is underscored by the use of nouns (insult, injustice) which indirectly evaluate negatively the Company men who had no close contact with the local Indian culture and did not know how to interact with them appropriately.

A further glimpse of the Bengal context is provided by excerpt (8) in which, once again, a negative evaluation of the East India Company can be inferred, by linking anaphorically the cluster to the decision of the government to exclude English gentlemen connected with it from any service to be provided:

(8) The government adopted measures which should give them the services not only of their own military and civil officers, but of independent English gentlemen not connected with **the East India** Company.

5.2.5. Guns

The incompetence of the officers involved in dealing with the mutineers is further foregrounded by the use of the last key word, guns. Its first most frequent concordance lines are provided in Table 7.

1	Cawnpore, and capturing **guns**. The rencontres were very
2	cavalry, and two 6-pounder **guns** and a howitzer; with this
3	Contingent, who have lots of **guns** with them. It would, therefore
4	to make free of our heavy **guns**. I have no doubt the place
5	company European and three **guns** but the fellows will

Table 7
Guns Concordances.

The most repeated collocations of Gun are verbs related to the handling of ammunitions (take, place, load, fall, drive), stative verb (be), nouns linked to weapons and the forces using them (howitzer, cavalry, company, force, ammunition, loss, rounds, entrenchment, road), person markers (they, we) and adjectives (European, big, great, immense, our, their).

The top cluster is GUNS AND THE which co-occurs with noun/s (GUNS AND THE+N) as indicated in excerpt (9) wherein the writer underlines, with the use of the person marker we his belonging to those fighting the mutineers. In addition, he expresses an implicit positive evaluation by the fact that not only the guns but also two remaining magazines were taken over from the rebels.

(9) During the day we took **guns and the** remaining two magazines.

In excerpt (10), though, a negative picture of the context is provided by the narrative sequence of action verbs (killed, wounded, fell). These co-occur anaphorically and cataphorically with the cluster sequence, encoding the disastrous outcome of the battling characterised by the loss of men as well as of light and heavy ammunition:

(10) One other officer was killed, and several wounded. Three **guns and the** howitzer fell into the enemy's hands.

6. Concluding remarks

The results of the analysis confirm the context-sensitive, personal and social interaction which characterises the letters of INMULE wherein the writers not only offer detailed first-hand information of the succession of dramatic events they are involved in, but also have their say against the rebellious Indians and against the East India Company's mismanagement of the whole situation in Bengal.

As to this point, an overview of the two top frequent key words highlights the constant close connection between the use of place names in INMULE and the subjective, emotive and critical reaction of those experiencing the events in such particular contexts.

Subjectivity, intended as taking a personal stance through the use of person markers and involvement in the context emerges also in the collocational and cluster concordance profiles of all the most frequent keywords taken into consideration in this study. This particularly occurs when negative views are expressed in the opinionated discourses, as when referring to the East India Company, the sepoys and the guns.

In addition, the evaluations mainly focus on the succession of military events or on military mismanagement and not on personal matters. This might derive from the impact of the dramatic events overwhelming the letter writers, or from the letter's content being extracted and published in the newspapers, thus excluding private communication which would have been inappropriate under such circumstances. Nevertheless, for their linguistic and discursive features the personal letters forming the small specialised INMULE corpus can be considered a peculiar hybrid in which the personal, the public, the historic and the social dimensions dynamically intertwine with reciprocal influence and in which also the writers and readers are part of the social and situational context. Although the corpus is relatively small, the emerging results cannot be generalised but they can open up new avenues of investigation of this particular genre.

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