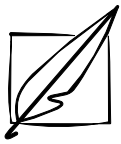

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Fanning fires. A corpus assisted analysis of women's letters during the 1857-58 Indian uprisings

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ABSTRACT

A paucity of studies has focused on propaganda in the mid-1800s, as the term was mostly linked to education and public opinion formation in a positive sense whilst its pejorative meaning was acquired from WWI onwards. However, during the 1857-58 uprisings in India, the press published a number of letters written home from the colony which fanned fires against the Indians within the Victorian public. This study analyses a small corpus of private letters written by women during the Indian uprisings and published in the British press (WOPLEPIU). At the time, women were stereotyped as domestic creatures, helpless victims of Indian aggression, incapable of developing personal views whereas their letters include personal evaluations and may be considered as a form of propaganda. The methodology adopted is a mixed one. It starts with a corpus-driven approach followed by a corpus assisted discourse analysis of chosen key words and their clusters to analyse quantitatively and qualitatively their recurring phraseology. The findings indicate that women's letters provide not only factual details but also personal perspectives, thus challenging the stereotyped role of Victorian women while their letters were used for propagandistic reasons.

Keywords: Women, letters, propaganda, British press, uprisings, corpus linguistics

1. Introduction

The outbreaks of unrest among the Indian troops marked the beginning of a crisis which, according to Dawson (1995) was termed the 1857-58 Indian or sepoy 'mutiny', or the first 'national-popular imperialist war fought by Britain in its Empire, or, in nationalist terms, the 'First War of Independence' (Blunt 2000). The causes of the uprising were and are still contested. Bhargava (1992) claims that imperial narratives have tended to focus on the

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rumour that cartridges for new Enfield rifles had been greased with beef and pork fat. Having to bite into such cartridges before using them to shoot 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 'uprisings' consider they derived from situations that transcend simplistic categorisations as, for example, the grievances which were inseparable from subjection of the Indian population to foreign rule; the often very faint boundary between 'revolt' and 'collaboration' of the Calcutta Intelligentsia that regarded the British with contempt; the widening distance and intense growing disaffection between the Indian infantry soldiers and the officers of the British East India Company; the lack of empathy from the military administration to social discrimination (Chatterjee 2024; Bandeh-Ahmadi 2024; Bayly 1987, to mention a few).

The East India Company ruled on behalf of the British Crown during the first two decades of Queen Victoria's reign and annexed the province of Oudh in 1856. During the following year, detachments of the Bengal army mutinied in the garrison town Meerut, 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 significant support from the Indian population (Blunt 2000; Samson 2020a, 2020b, 2022).

By 1857, the revolts spread throughout central and northern India as the rebels captured large tracts of the North-Western Provinces and Awadh (Oudh), where the uprisings were also characterized by widespread agrarian unrest (Blunt 2000). The key episode was the Cawnpore uprising 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, their evacuation from Cawnpore turned into a massacre on 27 June 1857 along the Ganges 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 approached Cawnpore which was retaken. The uprising was brutally suppressed by more than 35,000 soldiers sent from Britain by June 1858. The Indian uprisings were the first serious challenge to British rule and it was used by the British to emphasize a cruel, evil and inferior image of the Indians seen also as superstitious and distrustful people who were rejecting the benefits of civilization offered to them by Britain (Nair 1996).

During the uprisings, not only men but also English women wrote home describing the dramatic conditions they were experiencing and, to reduce the paucity of information received from India, several of their letters were published in the press. On the one hand, the letters provided first-hand information, on the other hand, women provided many personal impressions of the tragic events taking place, they therefore easily involved emotionally their readership. By providing such impressions, the letters were viewed as useful to legitimise the military actions in India and encourage the government to send troops from England.

In order to investigate the language used by such 'organised persuasion', as De Vito (1986) names propaganda, this study aims to extend the present literature by analysing a small corpus of letters written by women to their relatives in England and published in English[1] newspapers during the Indian uprisings. An initial corpus driven approach followed by a corpus assisted discourse analysis (CAD) is adopted and it is integrated with discourse analysis to qualitatively interpret the recurring semantic sequences (Groom 2005; Charles 2006; Hunston 2008) in the attempt to answer the following questions:

1) Which key lexical items are used by the English women to represent the 1857-58 uprisings in their letters?
2) Which semantic sequences encode the women's personal perspectives of the uprisings and are used for persuasive propagandistic purposes?

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: section two focuses on propaganda and women's letters published in the press during the uprisings; section three describes the corpus and the methods adopted whereas section four analyses the data. Conclusions are drawn in section five.

2. Propaganda and women's letters in the press

2.1 Propaganda

Most researchers have concentrated on the twentieth century pejorative meaning of propaganda, principally due to the impact of the First and Second World Wars' horrors of the authoritarian contamination of the term.

[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.

The latter was linked to systematic governmental campaigns carried out under the aegis of centralised propaganda departments and its negative connotations were completely cemented at least by the 1960s (Jarlbrink – Norén 2023).

Before 1914, though, propaganda had a wider meaning. In the early seventeenth century, the Catholic church used propaganda when referring to the propagation of faith to the entire world (Prendergast – Prendergast 2013) and, during the following three hundred years, the concept spread to various social and political spheres. Schieder and Dipper (1984) argue that the modern meaning of 'propaganda' has its roots in the aftermath of the French revolution, as counter revolutionary groups started to label revolutionary activities as 'propaganda', meaning something destructive and terrorising. By contrast, during the nineteenth century, propaganda acquired not only an educational connotation but also the function of forming public opinion through newspapers. This benevolence towards the press implies the acceptance of its persuasive power and the consequent forging of an extensive bond between it and the political spheres since, as Hampton (2004) states, there was an established tradition of politicians, government officials, groups, and individuals patronising newspapers and individuals to communicate and promote their policies.

As a matter of fact, propaganda and persuasion have been used interchangeably for long, although they differ. A fundamental feature of propaganda is an intentional communication of a message to the public. More specifically, Jowett and O'Donnell (2018) argue that propaganda is a subcategory of persuasion, as well as information. Propaganda focuses on the communication process – most specifically, on the purpose of the process. Propaganda is the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.

A deliberate attempt is usually linked with a clear institutional ideology and objective (Jowett – O'Donnell 2018). The purpose of propaganda is therefore to convey an ideology to an audience with a related objective which in this study is the preservation of English rule in India. However, to be effective in shaping the public's perceptions, the communication has to be persuasive. O'Donnell and Kable (1982: 9) define *persuasion* as a communicative process to influence others. A persuasive message has a point of view or desired behaviour for the recipient to adopt in a voluntary fashion. Persuasion is a complex, continuing, interactive process in which a sender and a receiver are linked by symbols, verbal and nonverbal, through

which the persuader attempts to influence the persuadee to adopt a change in a given attitude or behaviour because the persuadee has had perceptions enlarged or changed. Schiappa (2003) argues that words are always persuasive because they carry with them a whole system of values, and the use of a word is always an implicit argument to attain certain goals by means of the system of evaluation the definition of the word defends. Newspapers, therefore, played a pivotal role not only in informing but also in persuading readers to believe the content of the narrations within the published letters which were used to promote specific colonial ideologies of the time (Samson 2025) as well as accept the English seditious activities in India.

2.2 Women's letters in the press

During the 1857-58 uprisings in India, not only the electric telegraph line was still slow and unreliable with news reaching Britain after up to five weeks but, as Randall (2003) claims, the paucity of journalists on the ground led to a coverage of the events often consisting of reproducing stories from local papers, questionable depositions, muddled accounts, dubious journals, narratives of shell-shocked survivors, factual accounts and surmises by worried people in troubling times. Within such a system, reports could be biased, or a falsehood could be amplified without any real editing.

In attempting to meet the public's demand of information, newspapers would print private letters from India which were clearly demarcated from reporting. The letters appear to have been 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 (Samson 2025). 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.

Although the letters appear to have been sent from India, their authenticity has generated doubts. Slettvoll Kristiansen (2021) states that there is ample evidence to suggest that newspapers published letters that had been paid for by individuals or groups who wished to disseminate

a particular message for their own benefit. This suggests that interest groups might have paid to have their texts on the uprisings published by newspapers but to date this is still a hypothesis. Furthermore, it was not unusual to find the same letters initially published by The Times then undergoing the 'scissor and paste' or 'textual mingling' practice and later being recycled in peripheral newspapers to amplify and reinforce the same message or similar ones, as news is not simply that which happens, but what is worth conveying 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 (Fowler 1991: 13).

Through such journalistic strategies, it is therefore likely that private letters turned from unmediated into highly mediated texts, including those of editorial selectivity (Gregory – Hutchins 2004) which were deliberately published to partially inform but above all to produce reactions – taken into careful consideration (Jowett – O'Donnell 2018) – deriving from atrocity stories which might have been real or invented. What counted most is that the letters had 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 the letters published in the press can be viewed as an instrument of domination and social power considering that, as Wodak (2001), Fairclough (2001) and van Dijk (2011) argue, language is a suitable medium for covering and uncovering hidden ideologies intended to construct social norms and values.

The publication of women's letters was therefore a means to fan fires, that is to generate a cry for vengeance of the English in India. Such a reaction might have been intensified when reading the impressionistic narrations of the dramatic events the English women were experiencing. These features had also several other purposes. They provided a sense of authenticity to the communication conveyed; the repeated use of the personal pronouns 'I' and 'we' allowed the readership to identify with the writers and to develop a sense of membership of the newspaper community publishing them (Warren 2000; Conboy 2010; Chapman 2013). Moreover, they contributed to the development of 'civic engagement' to be understood as an appraisal of issues which were pre-selected as of 'public' significance that not only permeated mid-Victorian society and allowed ordinary people to make sense of major events and crises unfolding around them, but they may be considered as a powerful tool of colonial propaganda generating strong common national and instinctual responses to the attacks on the English rule and identity.

3. Corpus and methods

3.1 Corpus

In order to attempt answering the mentioned research questions, I specially compiled a small specialised corpus of Women's Letters – WOPLEPIU (43,000 words) – written during the 1857-58 Indian Uprisings and Published in the English Press. The number of letters written by women and published in the press is extremely limited – 22 – compared to those by men and it clearly indicates the different role women had in society as well as the choice of the editors to publish prevalently men's letters. However, women's letters with their very personal evaluations and perspectives suggest the capacity to create stronger impressions in their readers.

WOPLEPIU for its limited dimension allows a systematic analysis of natural language produced during the uprisings and it serves representative non-biased samples of authentic language. This can be objectively analysed by the observer without allowing any intra-personal characteristics to interfere with the scientific interpretation of the data (Hiltunen – Loureiro-Porto 2020). Furthermore, 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). This is an important advantage, as close reading provides a chance to reveal features which otherwise would be less obvious (Hiltunen – Loureiro-Porto 2020: 4), even though McEnery and Baker (2016: 3-6) claim that "the issue of size becomes acute when one tries to use such corpora to explore words of what one might describe as moderate or low frequency; there is simply not enough data to make generalizations". However, although large corpora contain higher frequencies and a broader range of genres, the results are not always possible to be re-contextualised, especially in corpora providing access to a limited amount of co-text and lacking detailed information regarding other contextual aspects (Samson – Bös 2021).

All the letters in WOPLEPIU were downloaded from the British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) and were saved in txt format without "cleaning" them. Those which were unreadable were instead not taken into consideration. Table 1 lists the British newspapers[2] from which the letters were downloaded.

2 *The Morning Advertiser* was first published in 1794 by the London Society of Licensed Victuallers. It was devoted to trade interests, rather than to the support of a political

Table 1. 1857-58 uprisings – British Newspapers including women's letters

The Morning Advertiser
The Inverness Courier
The Saunder's News-Letter
The Edinburgh Evening Courant
The Armagh Guardian
The Globe
The Worchestershire Chronicle
The Sheffield Daily Telegraph
The Cork Examiner

The letters appear to have been private, as they address relatives in Britain and were prevalently written by East India Company army officials' 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 women informing their addressees about their dramatic experiences in India.

3.2 Methods

The methodological approach I adopted in this study is a multiple one. Firstly, I started with 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).

In 1718, the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* began publication, being first printed by John McQueen or McEwen on the Royal Mile then passing to his protege, Alexander Kincaid in 1735. It survived until the *Edinburgh Evening News* came into existence in 1873. It was founded by James Watson (who had also published the *Edinburgh Gazette* from 1700) and had its main printing office was at Craigs Close at 170 High Street on the Royal Mile, the premises generally being known as the King's Printing House. In 1725, during the time of the Scottish Malt Tax riots, rival political factions used – or at least attempted to use – newspapers including the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* and the *Caledonian Mercury* as their "mouthpieces", as a letter from the then book trade apprentice Andrew Millar indicates. party. Its circulation, however, fostered by the society, was, in mid 19th century second only to that of *The Times*. Founded in 1794 as *The Publican's Morning Advertiser*, it is the UK's oldest continuously produced paper. In 1858 the paper became the first newspaper to subscribe to Reuters' news service.

The first issue of *The Inverness Courier and General Advertiser for the Counties of Inverness, Ross, Moray, Nairn, Cromarty, Sutherland and Caithness* appeared on 4 Dec 1817. The first editors were Mr. John and Mrs. Johnstone until 1824. Dr. Robert Carruthers was editor from April 1828 till his death in 1878. Today *The Inverness Courier* is published by Scottish Provincial Press, The *Saunders's News-Letter* was published from 1755 to 1879 and was one of Dublin's most established newspapers. During its publication, the paper was commercially successful. In order to publish a daily morning paper, printing began just after midnight. *Saunders's News-Letter* was noted for its remarkably neutral journalism. Thomas Power O'Connor began his career in journalism at the *Saunders's News-Letter* in 1867. O'Connor became a Member of

This allows to extract the relative most frequent word lists and key word lists which surface directly from WOPLEPIU, without being adjusted to fit pre-existing categories of the analyst.

The analysis therefore started by applying Word Smith Tools (WST) version 7 (Scott 2016) to WOPLEPIU, in order to generate a word list to then attain a key word list by comparing it with a Reference Corpus (RC), specifically, the Corpus of Late Modern British English Extended Version (CLMETEV) of 15 million words. This includes various text genres such as personal letters, literary fiction, scientific writing by men/women belonging to different social classes of 18th-19th century British society, ranging between 1710-1920.

Parliament for the Home Rule League. Later in his career, after the demise of the Irish Nationalist Party, O'Connor continued as an Independent MP. He founded and was the editor of several newspapers.

The *Armagh Guardian* 1844-71 was published by an unknown publisher in Armagh, Northern Ireland.

The Globe was a British newspaper that ran from 1803 to 1921. During the 1820s it supported radical politics, and was regarded as closely associated with Jeremy Bentham. By the 1840s it received briefings from within the Whig administration.

The *Worcestershire Chronicle* was founded on 4 January 1838 as "a new weekly paper devoted to the County". It was established by a joint stock company whose shareholders contributed £5000 of capital. The Chairman was Edward Holland Esq. and shareholders included three Members of Parliament and the Mayor of Worcester. The first issue of the *Chronicle* declared that it would hold to liberal principles based on truth and justice, and the full enjoyment to all men of civil and religious liberty". It would not exist as a "convenient medium for personal invective or party calumny". However, there was a recognised need for a county newspaper which would defend liberal principles against the Tory principles of other local papers, particularly *Berrow's Worcester Journal*. The *Worcestershire Chronicle* adhered to its liberal principles throughout its life and boasted a large circulation for many years.

The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* was Sheffield's first daily newspaper, published in 1855 by bookseller, printer and patent medicine dealer, Joseph Pearce. In 1864, Pearce sold on to Frederick Clifford and William Leng. was discontinued along with its sister paper, the *Worcestershire Herald*, in 1930. The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, edited by Leng, adopted a Conservative stance in opposition to the Liberal *Sheffield Independent*, run by the Leader family since 1829, but his aim was to give the Conservative Party cause wider appeal. The *Telegraph* was one of the first newspapers to introduce linotype printing, whereby a whole line of type could be produced at one time. Faster typesetting by fewer operatives increased output allowing newspapers to increase the number of pages per issue.

The Cork Examiner was founded by John Francis Maguire under the title in 1841 in support of the Catholic Emancipation and tenant rights work of Daniel O'Connell. First published in 1841 *The Cork Examiner* can be considered a national newspaper with a regional emphasis. The newspaper was published three times a week. In July 1861 it became a daily newspaper. During the Irish War of Independence and Irish Civil War, the *Cork Examiner* (along with other nationalist newspapers) was subject to censorship and suppression.

Secondly, I drew on the Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis (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 semantic patterns which construe meaning beyond their immediate lexico-semantic associations (Bondi 2008: 35).

My key word choice – Delhi3, sepoys, our – derived from the list generated by WST 7. More specifically, Delhi was based on the assumption that, firstly, the letter writers repeatedly referred to place names where the uprisings were taking place and where they were trapped. While this had a referential function in providing geographical contextualisation as to where the events were occurring, the purpose was also to create and share an environment through which the reader could understand and experience the events. In addition, within a place layer of intersecting meanings, social relations and overlapping time and space come together (Massey 1995) and contribute to persuade readers of the need to dedicate attention to the facts represented.

Sepoys represent the enemy, the Other which gave way to the uprisings that challenged the English rule and are narrated through the English women's gaze. Van Dijk (2006) argues that the strategy of negative other presentation is very typical in a biased account of the facts in favour of the writer's own interests, while blaming negative situations and events on opponents or on the Others.

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3 *Cawnpore,* the place in which the major massacre of women and children took place during the uprisings and that symbolised the imperial crisis as a civil war while revealing the inseparability of national and imperial power, honour, and prestige (Samson 2025) is mentioned in very few letters. As a consequence, the relative low frequency of the place name is linked to a lack of cluster collocations which determined its exclusion from this study.

The possessive adjective our refers to the English women as well as to the wider English community, that is, the Us group which encodes multiple referents, apart from 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, that is all those involved directly or indirectly in the uprisings, while denoting a sense of colonial community extended to the metropolis (Samson 2025).

I investigated the recurring chosen key words in their collocational patterns, that is, the tendency of words, or group of words, to occur more frequently in some environments than others (Hunston 2010). These phraseological arrangements are based on the assumption that words are not to be seen as elements in isolation that can be slotted into syntactic frameworks, but as forming larger units of meaning (Sinclair 1996; Römer 2010). Since the meaning of words lies in their use and the latter cannot exist in isolation, use can only be recognised and analysed contextually and functionally. Consequently, I consider language to be characterised by continuous repetitions forming semantic patterns that is "sequences of words and phrases which may be very diverse in form and which are therefore more usefully 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 women letter writers express themselves while providing personal representations of the conflicts they and others were involved in.

4. Data analysis

Wordsmith Tools 7 (Scott 2016) detected 305 key words 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 actors involved, as listed in Table 2.

In Table 2, the first column shows the key word; the second, shows its frequency in the source text(s) – WOPLEPIU; the third, the percentage of the frequency; the fourth indicates the number of texts it was present in WOPLEPIU; 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 WOPLEPIU; 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.

Table 2. WOPLEPIU Key words

Key word	Freq.	%	Texts	RC. Freq.	Log_L (LL)	Log R	P
DELHI	80	0,19	18	28	950,65	11,20	0,0000000000
SEPOYS	38	0,09	12	11	458,08	11,47	0,0000000000
OUR	312	0,74	18	60	427,69	2,10	0,0000000000

The first key word in Table 2 is the place name, *Delhi* (Freq. 80; LL. 950,65), followed by the common noun, *sepoys* (Freq. 38; LL. 458,08) and the possessive adjective, *our* (Freq. 312; LL. 427,69), referring to the English community. The keyness of the three words chosen suggests a relative high frequency of Delhi and a strong polarisation between the Other/sepoys group and the US/English one in the letters. Therefore an analysis of the collocations for each key word will allow to highlight the various meanings these different key words acquire in the letters.

4.1 Delhi

The Concord programme of WST 7 was applied to the key place name *Delhi* to access information about its collocations, an extract of which are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Concordance – Delhi

1	mutinies at Meerut and **Delhi** our regiment showed symptoms
2	in expectation of news from **Delhi**, but none arrived. All depends
3	Commander-in-Chiefs proceedings in **Delhi** become very intense
4	heard of those at Meerut and **Delhi**, and that the Native Infantry
5	the regiment was ordered to **Delhi**, and I was most thankful when

Delhi collocates most frequently with grammar words (of, to, at, from, in, toward), stative verbs (be, have, remain, retain), action verbs (take, march, go, destroy, tame, join, assault, return, send, arrive, accompany, kill, move, fill), mental verbs related to intellectual not observable actions (believe, suppose, appear, hear, fear) as well as with adjectives (European, scarse, immense,

large, intense) and common nouns (news, ammunitions, rebels, infantry, Europeans, corps, reinforcements, soldiers, accounts, things). The collocates suggest that the main concern of the letter writers was receiving news and/or narrating their emotions connected to the succession of 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 semantic sequences. The latter allow to highlight the connotations which give sense to the phraseology of place names in different situational contexts and to underline their uniqueness in WOPLEPIU.

For example, Delhi's recurring relative most frequent semantic pattern V+ *news from Delhi* refers to the crucial role of news, as in excerpt (1):

(1) Last night we were much cheered by *the news from Delhi* of the destruction of the powder manufactory with 500 gunpowder makers. In fact, the rebels are getting dispirited.

In excerpt (1) the sequence of action recording sentences is typified by temporal relativity, that is, the use of past and present relative to the discursive present of letter communication that characterises the mix of written and oral discourse which is constantly used in such texts. Specifically, the encoder's narration of factual phenomena refers to time (*last night*) whereas the semantic pattern *the news from Delhi* refers anaphorically to the passive past tense *were cheered* which is used to foreground the succession of phenomena characterised 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''. Furthermore, Bednarek (2010) claims that evaluation typifies news discourse, since it reflects 'news values' (Bell 1991; Brighton – Foy 2007) and construes relationships with readers while structuring the news texts and shaping the readers' perceptions of the situation.

As to this point, the semantic pattern *the news from Delhi* also refers cataphorically to the *destruction of the powder manufactory* wherein the noun *destruction* followed by the detailed factual information, *500 gunpowder makers,* underscores the writer's subjective satisfaction for the goal achieved by the English while the details provided contribute to the credibility of the

news. Moreover, the encoder uses the discourse marker *in fact* to introduce a phenomenon-identifying sentence *the rebels are getting dispirited* which reinforces the writer's evaluative representation of the Other/sepoys and underscores her satisfaction for their annihilation.

By contrast, the semantic pattern *news from Delhi* is loaded with negative emotivity in excerpt (2):

(2) No good *news from Delhi* yet. We have 24-pounders, but only ammunitioners; and when they were going to get the howitzers into play they found they had no metal fuses.

In (2), the narration is characterised by present and past verb tenses (*have, were going to get, found*) referring to a succession of action recording sentences which are introduced by the coordinating conjunction *but* linking contrasting situations (We have 24-pounders, *but* only ammunitioners) that underline a negative evaluation. This negative view is further reinforced by the temporal subordinating conjunction *when* referring to the impossibility of the English to use their cannons since there were no fuses to detonate the explosive charge and inflict maximum damage on the sepoys (*when* they were going to get the howitzers into play, they found they had no metal fuses). The representation provided, apart from highlighting the encoder's disappointment deriving from the lack of adequate armaments to fight the sepoys, provides factual information which is used to make the readers understand the urgent need for the government to intervene by sending ammunitions and troops to India.

4.2 Sepoys

The Concord programme of WST 7 was then applied to the key noun *Sepoys*, to access information about its collocations, an extract of which are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Concordance – Sepoys

1	children of impulse are these **Sepoys** that they will one hour good service
2	Takes his couch in the midst of his **Sepoys**, and you can fancy the sort
3	next morning at day light the **Sepoys** were asked to give up their arms
4	In that station the **Sepoys** or native soldiers were joined by surrounding
5	ioined there by their brother **Sepoys**, and mastered all the Europeans

Sepoys co-occurs most frequently with grammar words (*of, to, at*), stative verbs (*be, have*), action verbs (*join, guard, give, come, fight, disarm, make, burn, leave*), nouns (*regiment, army, night, morning)* but also with determiners (*some, several*), possessive/pronouns (*they, their, our*), adjectives (*faithful, treacherous, native)* and adverbs (*after, when, now*).

The most recurring semantic pattern *the Sepoys were + V* can be seen, for instance, in excerpt (3):

(3) In that station *the Sepoys were* joined by the surrounding villagers, massacred an infinity of Europeans, before the British troops could be here.

In excerpt (3) the semantic pattern refers anaphorically to spatial deixis *In that station* that serves prototypically to draw the reader's attention to a specific point and new aspect of an existing one of the discourse that is derived by the situational context of utterance whose centre point is the 'here and now' of the narration within the letter. Moreover, the recording of successive actions – *joined by the surrounding villagers, massacred an infinity of Europeans* – provides factual information loaded with a negative emotive connotation that foregrounds the highly dangerous context. This high sense of horror is further reinforced by the use of the adjective *infinity* referring to the extremely high number of *Europeans* being massacred before the arrival of the British troops. The purpose of the communication is to inform the reader about the dramatic situation the English were in, deriving from the uprisings involving not only the sepoys but also the villagers, thus generating strong distress in the readers while encouraging mutual understanding of the information and underlining the highly negative connotations of the Other.

In excerpt (4) another perspective of the sepoys is offered:

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

In excerpt (4) the semantic pattern collocates with a succession of active verbs (*give up, came, driven out, smothered*) and mental ones (*think, remember, obliged, tired*) which are linked to specific time references (*next morning, in the evening*) and spatial reference (*of the station*) that draws the reader's attention to a specific point of the situational context within the letter. Moreover, the use

of the person markers (*I, we*) and the impressionistic perspective on the event (*I think that was the longest day I ever remember*) in the narration increases personal involvement and identification between the encoder and the reader. The personal perspective of the representation is further underlined by the use of the coordinating conjunction *but* which links contrasting situations while referring to a succession of action recording sentences (*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) indicating the sepoys' resistance to be subdued, thus representing a danger for the English. The negative connotation of the whole context is further underscored by the representation of the harsh weather conditions the English had to face (*a dust storm came on, which nearly smothered us*) which, on the one hand, has a referential function and, on the other, has the purpose of generating deep concern in the readers due to the presence of the Other/enemy.

4.3 Our

Finally, the Concord programme of WST 7 was applied to the key possessive adjective *our* to access information about its collocations, the most frequent of which are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Concordance – Our

1	mutinies at Meerut and Delhi **our** regiment showed symptoms of
2	morning we were all roused out **our** beds and told to hasten to
3	told to hasten to Major Sleeman's as **our** regiment was going to mutiny
4	night outside, and we have guard at all **our** bunglows, and all is going
5	fearful times we live in! We cannot say **our** throats are safe from day to day

Our co-occurs most frequently with grammar words (*at, to, of,*), stative verbs (*have, be*), determiners (*all, some*), adjectives (*little, poor)* and nouns (*loss, house, position, men, party, servants, God, regiment, escape, force, officers)* that refer to private life as well as to the military aspects of the uprisings. This is reflected in the most frequent semantic pattern *our loss was+V* as in excerpt (5):

(5) *Our loss was* estimated altogether about 120 killed and wounded. Thirteen guns were captured, and great loss inflicted on the enemy.

In excerpt (5) the narration is characterised by a succession of active verbs (*killed, wounded, captured, inflicted, suppressed*) linked to the activities in and

the outcome of the battles. The repeated factuality which is communicated in figures (*120 killed and wounded*, *thirteen guns*), while framed within space (Hyderabad) and time (18th July), provides not only authenticity to the communication but it also indicates the writer's grounded knowledge of military facts. The referential function of the information is also loaded by the writer's positive evaluation expressed by her satisfaction for the victory of the English over the sepoys (*thirteen guns were captured*, *great loss inflicted on the enemy*). By doing so, the writer points at her strong sense of belonging to the English/Us community that is represented as triumphant over the Sepoys, the enemy. The same attitude can be found in excerpt (6):

(6) *Our loss was* six killed and twenty-five wounded. A rising took place in Hyderabad on 18th July, but was quickly suppressed.

The narration is once again characterised by a succession of active verbs (*killed, wounded, suppressed*) referring to battle activities but also to the overcoming of the sepoys/enemy/Other. As in excerpt (5), the information not only acquires authenticity by conveying precise figures (*six killed, twenty-five wounded*), temporal (*18th July*) and spatial (*Hyderabad*) indications but also by their linkage with particular personal experiences and meaning for the letter writers who, in this way, have a stronger persuasive impact on their readers. Moreover, the narration is typified by positive evaluation of the capacity of the English to always eventually win their enemy (A rising took place…*was quickly suppressed*) that is underscored by the use of the adverb *quickly*. By doing so, the writer demarcates her ground of belonging to the English/Us group while implying colonial hegemony and ethnic differences characterising colonialism (Samson 2020b) which the newspapers were strongly supporting at the time, as all the excerpts suggest.

5. Concluding remarks

The key lexical items *Delhi, sepoys* and *our* used by the women in WOPLEPIU reflect, firstly, the need to provide a geographical contextualisation of the uprisings taking place with the aim of creating and sharing an environment through which the reader can understand and imagine the events within a place. The latter, in fact, includes layers of intersecting meanings wherein time and space overlap with social relations. Secondly, the sepoys, in the women's view constantly represent the enemy, the Other to be subdued because they were challenging the English colonial rule. Thirdly, the

possessive adjective *our* refers to the English women and the wider English community, that is, the Us ruling group they belong to which, through their letters in the press, is extended from the periphery to the metropolis creating in this way a deep, horizontal national community (Anderson 1983).

The analysis of the recurring semantic sequences of the key lexical items, their collocates and concordances suggests they have more than a function. All the excerpts extracted from WOPLEPIU are characterised by detailed factual information. More specifically, the precise figures regarding the loss of English and European military forces, the sepoys, the names of the armaments used as well as the succession of active verbs referring to military actions indicate that the women letter writers possessed a good understanding of the military context and could therefore be considered credible and useful to disseminating colonial propaganda.

Furthermore, the negative discourses and evaluations expressed by the women in WOPLEPIU are recurrently about weapons, troops, a deficiency of military strategy and the lack of concern of the English government which foregrounds the propagandistic purpose of the letters. These have the purpose of making the public aware of the disastrous situation the English were experiencing in India as well as persuading it to call for proper military intervention in India to defend a sense of national collectivity and sameness through a common cause of existence.

The content of the letters further suggests that conflicts were not to be considered as exclusively a masculine domain but that the evaluations by what was considered the weak gender show an awareness of what was important and valuable to their persona as well as to the English community. In doing so, the information and the personal points of view expressed in the letters play a pivotal role in shaping the readers' perceptions, since they are linked to individual experiences as well as to social norms. They have, therefore, the purpose of generating shared emotional and rational reactions in the newspapers' readership and in the institutions while contributing to strong common national and instinctual responses to the attacks on the British identity, rule, and place.

Although WOPLEPIU is a small corpus which does not allow generalisations, the data nevertheless underscore the necessity to consider Victorian women from multi-faceted angles and to overcome their stereotyped portrayal by viewing them instead as active fire fanners well embedded in the colonial ideology and serving the propaganda of the time.

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