

From private to public: Letters contextualising the 1857-58 mutiny in the British press

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on private letters which turned public by their publication in British newspapers and contextualised the 1857-1858 mutiny in India. In doing so, they provided first-hand information of the dramatic events being experienced, and shaped the news presented as well as the readers' opinions, thus foregrounding how letters can be considered a situated activity, in that they are written for a specific recipient and purpose. By adopting a corpus linguistic approach integrated with a qualitative interpretation, the study analyses the use of repeated keywords and their clusters' discursive environment in a small specialised corpus of letters written by men and women during the mutiny. The emerging data suggest the language used attempts to generate emotive and critical reactions in the readership while creating a sense of borderless community across the empire by connecting personal concerns to a wider sense of public engagement while legitimising and or delegitimizing the 1857-58 mutiny.

Keywords: letters, British press, mutiny, corpus linguistics, place names, sepoys, weapons.

1. Introduction

For centuries conflicts have been fought by military means on battlefields as well as over public opinion through the press (Taylor 1997; Thussu – Freedman 2003) where all forms of information are drawn in, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to drive public acceptance and support a country's actions. Conflicts have always been highly newsworthy, as they build an allure by

tempting readers to side with the good heroes against evil within appealing narratives that persuade the public to take a stand in the conflict (Nohrstedt 2009). As a result, the public's sympathies or antipathies depend on how it identifies with the different parties in conflict, and which strategy best gains attention and emotional engagement, as in the case of private letters turning public in the press during the 1857-58 mutiny¹.

The distinction between private and public communication was a blurred dichotomy until the 19th century, when a cultural shift took place and private goods and interests were no longer to be confused with public institutions (Del Lungo Camiciotti 2010). This was determined, on the one hand, by an increasing intervention of the state and its legal apparatus in social spaces typified by local communities; on the other hand, by the spread of silent reading which encouraged solitary meditation and individual piety (Del Lungo Camiciotti 2010).

Within the private/public dichotomy, letters represent a continuum. They are considered private when two parties are involved and reciprocal communication is not to be divulged, but in the case of private letters contextualising the 1857-58 mutiny in the press, the private communicative context undergoes a re-contextualisation. The events are discursively represented within social practices that regulate collective interaction in what can be termed a multi-layered context. The concept, drawing on Pahta and Taavitsainen (2010), involves both textual contexts and 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.

Within this perspective, this study analyses a corpus of private letters written during the 1857-1858 mutinies in India and published at the time in the press. By adopting a corpus driven methodology integrated with a qualitative interpretation, the repeated keywords and their recurring clusters' discursive environments are investigated as they contribute to contextualising the representation of the dramatic events in the newspapers.

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 in the press, section four describes the corpus and the methods adopted, whereas section five analyses the data. Section six concludes the paper.

¹ The 1857-58 mutiny was actually characterised by several uprisings.

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 (Nielsen 2020; Dutta – Rao 2015; Major – Bates 2013, to mention a few) about the causes of the 'mutiny' focus on the organization of the Bengal army which was characterised by a widening distance between British officers and sepoys and the annexation of the province of Oudh in 1856. The year was characterised by intense growing disaffection among Indian infantry soldiers against the British East India Company which, till then, ruled on behalf of the British Crown.

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

The key episode was the Cawnpore mutiny in which the East India Company forces and civilians were caught unprepared for an extended siege and were forced to surrender to the rebel forces under Nana Sahib, an aristocrat, in return for a safe passage to Allahabad. However, their evacuation from Cawnpore turned into a massacre on 27 June 1857 along the Ganges river as the 120 British women and children captured by the sepoys were killed in the Bibighar massacre. Their remains were thrown down a nearby well in an attempt to hide evidence, as the East India Company rescue force from Allahabad approached Cawnpore which was retaken in mid-July 1858.

In order to re-establish the British law, the Company forces engaged in widespread retaliation against the captured sepoys and local civilians who had supported the revolt (Blunt 2000).

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

3. Letter writing and private letters in the press

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. The earliest letters were closely linked to the bureaucratic needs of expanding empires (Ogborn 2008), but personal letters or familiar letters were not unknown even in ancient times. For long, they 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).

Letter writing is anything but a static process. It can be viewed as activity rather than 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 (Nevalainen – Tanskanen 2007)². Letters can be considered concrete, unmediated when private, historical artefacts which are strongly rooted in particular contexts and form the hidden underpinnings of much historical research. They can also be viewed as a social practice displaying the signs of a distinct environment in which they are embedded when they appear in the press.

The publication of letters in various text types goes back to the early 1620s in England, a time when the country was already playing a leading role in the development of the press in Europe, from the early newsletters to the first newsbooks (Ambrosi – Tessardo 1991). From the mid-nineteenth century, though, letters in the newspapers were clearly demarcated from reporting, as the rise of professional journalists provided news that could be distinguished from amateurs' contributions based on issues of personal concern. Letters to the editor are, thus, something distinct from the news,

² Cf. Samson 2020 for further details on letter writing.

given the ways in which they are produced, how those involved understand them, and how they present themselves to the readers (Nielsen 2010). Letters have, however, been directly connected to a wider sense of public engagement and have frequently been published when, for example, news took long to reach England from the colonies, acquiring therefore a referential-expressive function.

This has led us to view letters which appeared as personal communication in the press as actually being carefully crafted and curated products of editorial processes, or according to Wahl-Jorgensen (2002), construed through the co-creation of news workers and letter writers. As such, they turn from unmediated into highly mediated texts through journalistic routines, including those of editorial selectivity (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002; Gregory – Hutchins 2004). The latter privileged letters that related to content already on the news agenda – in this case the Indian Mutiny – and were therefore “moulded” to fit journalistic criteria, given their public significance (Brownlees et al. 2010) and their importance as gauges of public opinion and as the conduit for many editorially orchestrated campaigns (Conboy 2017).

Letters, in fact, can have more than a purpose. On the one hand, as in the case of the mutiny, they morally orient readers with the newspaper’s editorial position, while serving as a space for a variety of opinions and revealing glimpses of how ordinary people made sense of major events and crises unfolding around them. Jones (1996) views letters as an essential means of feeling the national pulse and as a form of sensitive and complex political representation. This positioned readers’ letters as a manifestation of pre-existing conversations already occurring elsewhere, a view shared by mid-Victorian editors. As Hampton (2004) argues, an ideal of politics by public discussion on the questions of the day permeated mid-Victorian elite society and the model of the rationally debating citizen was central in the creation of discourses of journalism in the early nineteenth century (Chalaby 1998; Wahl-Jorgensen 2007), leading to journalism of representation (Hampton 2004) with a strong social and political impact.

On the other hand, epistolary narratives helped to contextualise the mutinous events through reciprocal productions of place (Tuan 1991; Caquard 2011; Entrikin 1991; Herman 2001). The orientation elements connected writers and readers (Herman 2001), while helping to express human experience and lived space, since narrative itself can be a “spatially symbolic act” (Tally 2011) and (re)orientation can be managed and achieved in or through narratives.

Research on letters published in British newspapers in the 19th century has mainly focussed on the identification of letters of opinion and letters asking for advice in the Readers Letters page (Baczynski 1987), on the relationship between letters and the development of popular press (Bromley – Stephenson 1998), on the function of correspondence sections in the provincial press and their reader value (Jackson 1971), on the strong element of rituality in the topics approached in letters and their political influence (Funstall 1977), or on the editorial choices of letters (McNair 2000), to mention a few. By contrast, there is a paucity of corpus linguistic analyses of letters published in the press specifically during the 1857-58 mutinies in India. This study attempts to fill the existing gap.

4. Corpus and methods

In order to analyse the linguistic features of letters written during the 1857-58 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 British newspapers³ from which the letters were downloaded.

³ *The Morning Advertiser* was first published in 1794 by the London Society of Licensed Victuallers. It was devoted to trade interests, rather than to the support of a political party. Its circulation, however, fostered by the society, was, in mid-19th century second only to that of *The Times*. Founded in 1794 as *The Publican's Morning Advertiser*, it is the UK's oldest continuously produced paper. In 1858 the paper became the first newspaper to subscribe to Reuters' news service.

The Morning Post was a conservative daily newspaper published in London from 1772 to 1937. Initially a Whig paper, it was purchased by Daniel Stuart in 1795, who made it into a moderate Tory organ. A number of well-known writers contributed, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb, James Mackintosh, Robert Southey and William Wordsworth. In the seven years of Stuart's proprietorship, the paper's circulation rose from 350 to over 4,000. During the 1850s, the *Post* was very closely associated with the Palmerston ministry. The paper was noted for its attentions to the activities of the powerful and wealthy, its interest in foreign affairs, and in literary and artistic events.

The London Evening Standard was founded in 1827 as *The Standard* and it gained eminence for its detailed foreign news, contributing to a rise in circulation.

The Evening Mail was launched in 1823, it proved to be the longest lasting evening paper in Ireland. The paper was an instant success seeing its readership hit 2,500 in a month, making it, when few could read and the only people who bought papers were the gentry and aristocracy, the city's top seller. Its conservative readership ebbed and flowed during the century.

Table 1. 1857-58 British Newspapers

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

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

The methodological approach I adopted in this study is a mixed one. 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 the corpus is pivotal, as findings are directly derived from the corpus and not filtered through existing concepts. 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, and 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 of the frequency of each word in the INMULE word-list with the frequency of the same word/s in the reference word-list. A word is considered key in a keyword list if it is

The Morning Chronicle was founded in 1769 by William Woodfall as publisher, editor, and reporter whose journalism slanted toward the Whig party in the House of Commons.

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

The London Daily News was founded in 1846 by Charles Dickens, who also served as the newspaper's first editor. It was conceived as a radical rival to the right-wing *Morning Chronicle*.

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 letter writers' representations of and personal perspectives on the events and those involved in them.

5. Data analysis

Wordsmith Tools 7 (Scott 2016) detected 236 keywords which correspond to the relevance of the different aspects of the topic during the mutinies. The comparatively most frequent key words are related to place and space as indicated in Table 2. In the Table, the first column shows the key word; the second shows its frequency in the source text(s) – INMULE; the third, the percentage of the frequency; the fourth indicates the number of texts in which it was present in INMULE; the fifth, its frequency in the reference corpus (the CLMETEV) and in the last column the *p* value, that is, the keyness value of the item under consideration.

Table 2. INMULE Key words – *Cities*

Key word	Freq.	%	Texts	RC. Freq.	P
<i>Delhi</i>	87	0,21	22	28	0,0000000000
<i>Cawnpore</i>	56	0,13	14	4	0,0000000000
<i>India</i>	84	0,20	26	1.287	0,0000000000

The relative high frequency of place names shows spatial and locational awareness in the accounts of the mutinies and are not surprising since, as Knopf (2014) claims, geographic understanding, awareness and communication are key factors in military activities because they create spaces, places, environments and landscapes with references to a distinct moral order (Woodward 2005). This emerges in the recurring use of place names in the corpus which foregrounds the need of the letter addressers to name places in order to label, identify and contextualise the Indian dramatic events. In addition, geographical names usually mean something that goes beyond a place's topography which tends to abstract and reduce the complexity of a topographic place to a single or a few fundamental traits representing irreplaceable cultural values of vital significance to people's sense of being (Andersson 1994; Helleland 2012). However, place names also function at an emotive, ideological community-creating level and an analysis of the key clusters in Table 2 significantly highlights the various meanings geographical territories can acquire in representing the mutinies in colonial India.

5.1 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.

Table 3. Concordances – *Delhi*

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

Delhi frequently collocates with grammatical words (*of, to, at, from, in, toward*), stative verbs (*be, have*), and a few private verbs related to intellectual not observable states (*believe, suppose, know, fear*), but most importantly with action verbs (*take, march, force, assault, return, arrive, accompany, kill, move, fill*), as well as with common nouns referring to the military context (*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 among the main concerns of the letters in the press there was the exigency to communicate the succession of the military events but also to help the writers to reorient themselves in the disorienting experience of conflict while simultaneously helping readers to better comprehend actions in it.

Given that the meaning of concordance strings can emerge only if examined within a wider context, I considered them within their source text and analysed the recurring cluster patterns. The latter allow us 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.

For example, Delhi's recurring comparatively most frequent cluster *there is now* co-occurs repeatedly with + n/s as, for instance, in excerpt (1):

- (1) *There is now* a large force, about 15,000 men, in Delhi, 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 more than one function. It states 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 enhances 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. Furthermore, the use of *There is now* recalls Herman (2001) who uses the concept of spatialisation to indicate "spatial reference" applicable to narrative and letter communication wherein the writer prompts the reader to relocate from the site of the communicative interaction, the letter, to the space-time location of the narration.

These features, however, verbally encode not only space but also place – Delhi – which Gieryn (2000) defines as having geographic location and imbued value. Letter communication, in particular, uses deliberate forms of deixis to refer to the writer, intended reader(s), time, and space, invoking the "two worlds" of sender and receiver and managing the spatio-temporal distance between them (Barton – Hall 2000). In excerpt (1) deixis has therefore

two functions: drawing attention to the detailed high number of forces previously employed to make Delhi fall – *much less than half that number* – and indicating the distance from the current time as well as from current reality or facts by frequently using the present tense. This foregrounds the immediacy of the first-hand detailed information, that is, the way military forces are deployed while wishing the enemy's defeat. Furthermore, the immediacy of the information provided is also characterised by the writer's personal perspective, which emerges in the basic evaluative sequence (evaluation + entity/process evaluated): *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* which collocates with action verbs (*storm, overtake, hang, kill*) as in excerpt (2) and features multiple deictic shifts leading the reader through a series of events – *Delhi has been stormed, the king of Delhi is hung, mutinous troops were killed*:

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

In excerpt (2), the narration, i.e. action recording sentences in sequence, is typified by temporal relativity (Werlich 1983), that is, the use of past and present constantly relative to the discursive present of letter communication which 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 and supporting the rule of one collectivity over another, wherein the 'other' – *the mutineers, king of Delhi, mutinous troops* – is ruled over and demarcated according to the process of differentiation (Samson 2020). Within this perspective, adjectives (*fearful, mutinous*), nouns (*retribution*) and verbs repeatedly encoding brutal actions also acquire a positive connotation for the public.

5.2 Cawnpore

The most frequent concordance lines of *Cawnpore*, the second comparatively 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 a particular personal experiential and subjective meaning for the letter writers.

Table 4. Concordances – *Cawnpore*

N	Concordance
1	From <i>Cawnpore</i> nearly all the residents made their way
2	So far, the <i>Cawnpore</i> mutiny had none of those outrageous features
3	the rebels are in three engagements, occupying <i>Cawnpore</i> , and capturing guns.
4	Sir Hugh Wheeler has been killed at <i>Cawnpore</i> .
5	things have remained in town quo, except that <i>Cawnpore</i> has been reoccupied.

Cawnpore collocates with grammatical words (*of, to, at, from*) stative verbs (*have, be,*), private verbs (*believe, read, fear*), fictive motion verbs (*march, send, reoccupy, come, make*), common nouns (*Europeans, massacre, time, road, tragedy, troops, guns, place, mutiny*) and some 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*) underlining the pervasiveness of subjectivity markers (Herring et al. 2004) encoding 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 as by the inadequate preparation, reaction and number of the English forces at the time in India:

- (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?

While subjectivity contributes to the impressionistic views of the letter writers by pointing at interpersonal bonds which structure meaning, the repeated participation of *you* reinforces a continued relationship between the letter addressor and recipient, as the question *have you read of the Cawnpore tragedy?* in excerpt (3) indicates. Speaking to the recipient as if s/he were physically present is typical of language gap-closing (Fitzmaurice 2002) in letters wherein features of both orality and written language co-exist making them appear as a form of utterance which is not yet an unmediated conversation on paper.

This implies a shift of deictic centres, whereby 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. However, since the INMULE letters were published in the press, they represent a case of what Ambrosi and Tessardo (1991) term as a secondary orality. They argue that, like primary orality (conversation) letters, they generate a strong sense of belonging to a community, although the latter is much larger and less clearly defined than in primary orality and, specifically, *we have been within an ace of losing the empire* suggests the audience should be seen as part of the 'in-group' classification characterising colonialism (Samson forthcoming) 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 thus embody socially shared assumptions and practices that allow a high number of readers to construct their ways of being in society.

The second most frequent cluster *Cawnpore has been reoccupied* underscores motion, which, as mentioned, is a significant component of military manoeuvres that typify 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). The cluster repeatedly co-occurs also with cognitive verbs, for example *suppose* (*Cawnpore has been reoccupied + v*), which seem to function as a 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 – Diani 2010) – performs the primary function of unequivocally signalling the source of the evaluation, that is, the writer who, in this case, takes the responsibility for the implicitly positive evaluation of General Havelock developed by the subsequent element of the sequence in *this time Lucknow relieved*. In this sense, the 'framework' meaning element may be regarded as a form of self-attribution of the opinion expressed on an action. In addition, the evaluation implicitly refers to the expression of identity which is connected with the towns – *Cawnpore, Lucknow* – that entail perceived differences between 'us' (English) and 'them' (mutineers) occupying the towns.

5.3 India

From the analysis of the third key word, *India*, a change in the perspective of the facts related to the mutinies emerges as from the concordance lines in Table 5:

Table 5. Concordances – *India*

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

The collocates of *India* show again a high frequency of active verbs that, however, are unrelated to military actions (*send, put, remain, write, discuss, follow*), nouns that often refer to daily life (*letter/s, government, company, part, news, saving, regiment, time, troops, East, task, things, soldier, sister, brother, North, convent*) and adjectives (*special, European*) that are as generic as the adverbs (*very, recently*). There is a frequent use of person markers (*we, you, us*) signalling strong interaction between the addressor and his/her recipients. Furthermore, the top cluster *the East India* constantly co-occurs, not surprisingly, with a noun forming the proper name *the East India Company* as shown in excerpt (5) which foregrounds the prominent role held by the Company before and during the mutinies.

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

In example (5) *the East India Company* is closely linked to its deplorable actions towards the Indians, specifically the aristocrats, 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 (6) 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 English

government to exclude gentlemen connected with it from any service to be provided. As a matter of fact, the Company lost all its administrative powers following the Government of India Act of 1858, and its Indian possessions and armed forces were taken over by the Crown. Rule of India shifted therefore from the directors of the Company to a Secretary of State for India advised by a council, whose members were appointed by the Crown. The latter also directly appointed the governor-general, or viceroy, and provincial governors in India. The East India Company itself was formally dissolved by an Act of Parliament in 1874 and the British Raj, the direct imperial rule of India by the British state, began.

- (6) 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*.

Apart from place names, nouns are also linked to crucial features emerging in the INMULE keywords detected by Wordsmith Tools 7 (Scott 2016), as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. INMULE Key words – *Mutineers – Arms*

Key word	Freq.	%	Texts	RC. Freq.	P
<i>Sepoys</i>	48	0,11	16	11	0,0000000000
<i>Guns</i>	73	0,17	21	1.135	0,0000000000

The comparatively most frequent nouns *sepoys* and *guns* are strictly connected to the verbal representations and meaning of places in which the mutinies took place, as well as to insights into the human stories within the battles, the movements, and combatant's reflections on what occurred, what was done and why, thus creating personal geographies.

5.4 Sepoys

The comparatively most frequent concordance lines of *Sepoys* are listed in Table 7.

Apart from the grammatical words (*of, to, at*), stative verbs (*be, have*), action verbs (*come, guard, disarm, make, join, burn, leave*), cognitive verbs (*think, hope, pray*) and nouns (*regiment, army, night, morning*), *Sepoys* co-occurs also

with determiners (*some, several*), pronouns (*they*), adjectives (*faithful, native, their, our*) and adverbs (*after, when, now*) which differ from the previous key words.

Table 7. Concordances – *Sepoys*

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

This can be seen in excerpt (7) wherein the most frequent cluster of *the sepoys* collocates with prepositions (*of the sepoys + p*) which refer anaphorically to a cognition 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 safety of the English in the area:

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

In excerpt (8), 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*. In this way, a partially positive, realistic view of the mutiny is provided, as not all the sepoys were against the English:

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

5.5 Guns

The incompetence of the English 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 8.

Table 8. Concordances – *Guns*

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

The most repeated collocates of *gun* are verbs related to the handling of ammunitions (*take, place, load, fall, drive*), the 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*) which typify projective locations that are frequently found in descriptions or reference to weaponry used and linked to the location of the writer.

The top cluster *guns and the* co-occurs with noun/s (*guns and the + n*) and the use of the person marker *we* indicating his belonging to the English fighting the ‘other’, that is the mutineers. In addition, the addressor expresses an implicitly positive evaluation of the fact that not only the guns but also two remaining magazines were taken over from the rebels, a common feature in accounts of projective locations which overlap with elements of fieldcraft in military geography.

(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. However, all the military movements are not only related to the notions of territory that must be conquered but are also explicit in the potential for and reality of death (Knopf 2014):

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

6. Concluding remarks

The analysed data confirm the context-sensitive, personal and public interaction characterising the INMULE letters in the press which offer a detailed first-hand succession of dramatic events the English were involved in during the 1857-58 Indian mutiny. The letters are not only typified by the immediacy of the information provided from personal perspectives but also by the constant explicit or implicit writers' evaluations of the incidences occurring in specific places which contribute to shape the readers' views and how the world around them could or should be perceived. This foregrounds how letters can be considered a situated activity, in that they are written for a specific recipient and purpose.

As to this point, the recurring use of place names in the texts highlights their different functions. They are used to engender emotive and critical reactions towards the mutinies as well as to push the reader beyond their actual geographical location, by creating a sense of borderless community across the empire.

This sense of community is further enhanced by the evaluations of the military operations and the usage of weapons which recurrently distinguish the English from the others, thus generating in-group convergence and out-group divergence, a social identification process in which an individual recognises him/herself as a member of a social group or a larger collectivity, this being a crucial feature during any conflict calling for political stance. These letters can, therefore, be considered an effective way to connect personal concerns to a wider sense of public engagement while legitimising and/or delegitimising an issue as problematic as the 1857-58 mutiny.

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