Jan Kochanowski University Press

A denial of identity. The Armenian genocide in the letters to the editor of *The Times* 1914-1926

Isabella Martini

University of Florence

ABSTRACT

Genocide is the most violent denial of human identity, and it aims systematically to transform the societal organization of both victims and perpetrators. Considered the first among the genocides of the 20th century, the massacre of around 1.5 million Armenians has been denied official recognition by the Turkish government to date. Such denial has resisted not only international political pressure, but also evidence provided by news articles, editorials, and by letters to the editor documenting or referring to the massacre. Many letters to the editor of *The Times* mention the massacres that were later to be referred to as the Armenian genocide; the corpus analysed in this study includes those published closer to the events, between 1914 to 1926. Letters to the editor of a newspaper are selected for publication when their content fosters debate among the readers on topics which are particularly relevant for the newspaper's agenda, and they have rarely been the target of linguistic analysis. This study examines the linguistic patterns used to represent the Armenian genocide at the time of the events, and how these patterns influence the perception of the Armenian identity via its representation through the letters to the editor. Concordance lines, collocations, clusters and extended co-textual references of keywords related to the Armenian national identity will be analysed using a corpus-assisted approach.

Keywords: letters to the editor, national identity, Armenian genocide, corpus linguistics, concordance/clusters, denial, social transformation.

1. Introduction

Letters to the editor have been for decades the privileged space for selected readers to participate in the news discourse by engaging at a textual, referential, and interpersonal level, and thus being allowed to convey

criticism, judgement, and appeal for action (Pounds 2006). Published letters in newspapers keep alive a topic that is considered relevant to the reading public, as was the case of the Armenian genocide during World War I.

The massacre of the Armenians between 1915 and 1923 under Ottoman rule has always been denied the status of genocide by the Turkish government (Mamali et al. 2019; Üngör 2012). Despite considerable press coverage, the Turkish government has claimed that the genocide was a series of massacres that are part of ordinary wartime violence that targets civilians. These massacres, and their unprecedented systematic violence, were mentioned in many letters to the editor of *The Times* (Peltekian 2013). Accounts by survivors and eyewitnesses, as well as the studies conducted so far, have proved that those massacres were part of a concerted process aimed at a permanent transformation of Ottoman society that implied the dismantling of the national and human identity of the Christian minorities through systematic, ferocious acts of violence (Lemkin 1944; Kingsley 2019). Therefore, the Armenian identity seems to have undergone two different processes of denial: first, through the genocide, which is indeed the most violent, organised, and systematic denial of a national identity; and second, through the decade-long denial of the genocide by its perpetrators.

Presupposing these processes of denial of the Armenian national identity, this paper attempts to contribute from a linguistic point of view to the studies on identity intended as "public phenomenon, a performance or construction that is interpreted by other people" (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 4) and to those studies examining the discursive strategies adopted to dismantle national identities (De Cillia et al. 1999). To study how the Armenians' public identity was constructed in the news discourse at that crucial point in their national history, the linguistic representation (Partington 2015) of the Armenian identity in letters to the editor is analysed. A corpus of letters to the editor of *The Times* published between 1914 and 1926 collects the readers' stance on the massacre and provides data in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the most recurrent linguistic characteristics of the representation of the Armenian identity in the letters to the editor of *The Times*?

2) Are there any linguistic characteristics that might have contributed to the "social amnesia" of the Armenian genocide (Elayyadi 2017; Alayrian 2018)?

3) If so, how are these linguistic features used in the mediated news discourse of letters to the editor?

Despite their relevance for news discourse (Cavanagh – Steel 2019; Elspass 2012), corpora of letters to the editor have rarely been the object of a linguistic analysis (some exceptions are Chovanec 2012; Romova – Hetet 2012; Pounds 2005, 2006). Using a corpus-assisted quantitative and qualitative approach (Partington 2004, 2010; Partington et al. 2013), this analysis focuses on collocational patterns, concordances, and clusters (Hunston 2002) of the keywords *Armenia*, *Armenian*, and *Armenians* to answer the research questions.

2. The Armenian genocide and the denial of identity

The phrase "Armenian Genocide" specifically refers to the massacres of the Armenian living within the borders of the former Ottoman Empire. The genocide was initiated by the Turkish government on 24th April 1915, when several hundreds of notable Armenians were arrested in Constantinople and then murdered after being deported to Anatolia (Astourian 1990; Aybak 2016; Elayyadi 2017; Alayrian 2018). The massacre of the Armenian minority continued throughout the Ottoman Empire for months, until the autumn of 1916 in its most violent outbreak, and well into 1918, with news of murders and brutality reaching the international community even until 1923 (Dadrian 2003; Üngör 2012).

In 1915, Armenia was not an independent national entity, but rather a mental construct (De Cillia 1999) with a strong, centuries-old national identity. According to De Cillia (1999) and Wodak et al. (2009), this is a case where the production, reproduction, transformation, and destruction of related national identities take place through language and other semiotic systems, such as shared beliefs, emotional attitude, and behavioural dispositions, which is what identified the Armenian Christian minority as differing from the Turkish Muslim majority. When the identity of a certain group of people identifying in different cultural and/or ethnic traits, e.g., the Armenians, becomes intolerable to another group, e.g., the Turks, genocidal violence occurs to eradicate the national identity which is no longer tolerated (Lemkin 1944).

Crucial to the creation of a nation and of the discursive construction of its national identity are also time and space references. Time references include continuity with tradition and a shared origin in time, while spatial references are the visible territorial and local elements shared within the same national identity (Wodak 2009). Christian minorities and other

minorities were considered a threat to the desired social transformation of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire into a pan-Turkish state and had to be "relocated" outside of its borders (Elayyadi 2017). Therefore, together with religion and culture, the territorial dimension of the Armenian nation seems to have been another major cause of the Armenian genocide.

The massacres that started in 1915 were not the first attempt to "relocate" minorities from within the Ottoman borders. To discourage Armenians from claiming their independence and form their nation-state, 300,000 Armenians had already been massacred between 1894 and 1896 by Sultan Abdul-Hamid II. This, however, strengthened the Armenian nationalist sentiment, which led the Young Turks to consider the outbreak of the First World War as the chance to implement their plan and "Turkify" the Empire by eradicating non-Muslim minorities (Alayarian 2018). To understand how successful such eradication was, suffice it to say that while Armenians were considered a Christian nation-state under the Ottoman Empire prior to the genocide, they are now considered an ethnic group (Alayarian 2018).

3. Letters to the editor

Letters to the editor have been treated as a specific journalistic genre since the Victorian age (Hobbs 2019), and considered a privileged tool of civic engagement, intended as "an appraisal of issues which are preselected as of 'public' significance" (Cavanagh – Steel 2019, Brownlees et al. 2010).

Letters published in newspapers serve not only as reminders of topics already published in the news; according to Wahl-Jorgensen (2019), they also publicly express complaints that demand a reply and, ultimately, they strive to bring about social transformations. Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) also claims that letters to the editor are perceived as a powerful, influential tool because they "are understood, by readers and news organisations alike, as a privileged site for forms of public deliberation that might influence broader social, cultural and political developments" (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019: ix).

The letters included in the corpus are written by influential personalities of the time to inform the international audience of *The Times*, as reported by Peltekian (2013: xxv): "[…] British government officials, diplomats, members of parliament and citizens, some of whom had lived in Turkey; there are also letters written by Armenian notables and delegates (such as Nubar Pasha) or those living in England; there are some letters written by Armenian notables

and citizens of other nationalities who deemed it important to convey events and facts as they saw it". British and Armenians alike all wrote to *The Times* to sensitize public awareness of the events and to call for possible and immediate political and social resolutions of the situation. *The Times* was chosen in view of its status as a respectable and influential broadsheet (Conboy 2011) and also in response to the first-hand accounts of war correspondents (Knightley 2004). In this light, keeping the Armenian question relevant in the mediated discourse of letters to the editor (Hobbs 2019; Landert – Jucker 2011) for years during and after the massacres of 1915 (Mayersen 2016; Peltekian 2013) signals an editorial decision that stood against the denial of the extent of the massacres made by the Turkish government.

4. Investigating *The Times* online archive and creating the corpus

The Times provides access to a comprehensive and extensive online archive featuring OCR-scanned and PDF copies of all its articles from 1st January 1785 to 31st December 1985, which can be analysed through a corpus-assisted approach (Partington 2004, 2010, 2015). As shown, for example, in Sinclair (1994, 2004), Tognini-Bonelli (2001), Baker et al. (2008), Partington (2010), and Fotopoulos and Kaimaklioti (2016), Corpus Linguistics software-aided analysis performed on the news is particularly relevant when looking for the objective features of a specific discourse. This work follows the so-called "corpus-assisted" approach (Partington 2004, 2010) to examine recurrent collocations, concordances, and clusters of nodes related to the Armenian national identity *Armenia*, *Armenian*, *Armenians*. This methodological approach is particularly useful in quantitatively identifying recurrent linguistic patterns, on which to perform a qualitative discourse analysis to access non-obvious meaning "constructed and reinforced by the accumulation of linguistic patterns" (Partington – Marchi 2015: 220).

Letters to the editor of *The Times* were selected from *The Times and The Sunday Times Online Archive* using the search words *Armenia* and *Armenian*. The search results also included letters mentioning the noun *Armenians*. In the entire time span covered by the online archive (1785-1985), the term *Armenia* turned out to have 6,361 occurrences, while the term *Armenian* occurred 10,641 times. The time span under examination was set between 1st January 1914, more than one year before 24th April 1915, and 31st December 1926, which corresponds to three years after the more extended alleged duration of the Armenian genocide (Rafter 2016). This time span was selected

to study the representation of the Armenian question before, during, and after the genocide.

The corpus collects all the letters mentioning the Armenian question in the chosen time span; it will be referred to as LEAQ (Letters to the Editor on the Armenian Question) and it features around 120,000 tokens, i.e., "sequences of letters separated by spaces of punctuation" (Hunston 2002: 17). Using WordSmith Tools v.8.0 (Scott 2020), a wordlist was generated and compared with the written section of the BNC XML Edition corpus (2007), a 100-million-word collection of samples of written and spoken language that also includes extracts from regional and national newspapers, to obtain a keyword list of the LEAQ corpus. The keywords extracted from LEAQ are mostly nouns and adjectives of nationality as well as place names, all related to the nationalities involved in the Armenian question between 1914-1926. Table 1 shows the first eight relatively most frequent keywords by their ranking position on a 500 keyness scale:

Table 1. Keywords of the LEAQ corpus

Keyword	Freq.	%	Texts	RC. Freq.	P
TURKISH	398	0,34	110	1.408	0,0000000000
TURKS	271	0,23	100	463	0,0000000000
ARMENIANS	227	0,19	102	95	0,0000000000
ARMENIAN	247	0,21	108	258	0,0000000000
TURKEY	266	0,23	90	2.014	0,0000000000
CONSTANTINOPLE	166	0,14	62	249	0,0000000000
ARMENIA	141	0,12	75	322	0,0000000000
GREEKS	145	0,12	53	694	0,0000000000

The first column shows the keywords; the second shows their frequency in the source texts of LEAQ; the third, the percentage of the frequency; the fourth indicates the number of texts in which each keyword occurred in LEAQ; the fifth, its frequency in the reference corpus (the written section of the BNC XML Edition corpus) and in the last column the *p* value referring to the keyness value of the items under consideration. The search words referring to the Armenian national identity are all included in the most frequent keywords, which confirmed their relevance for the analysis and, ultimately, their choice as nodes, i.e., centre words of larger recurrent co-texts to be analysed. The keyword list suggests further analysis of other frequent keywords (*Turkish*, *Turks*, *Turkey*, *Constantinople*) to examine how

the Turkish national identity is represented in the corpus, which however exceeds the scope of the current analysis.

Some letters to the editor were not included in the corpus, because the search word *Armenian* pointed to the sinking of the *Armenian*, the vessel sunk on 28th June 1915 by a German submarine U-24, and these occurrences would not have been relevant to the lexical scope of this research. After having eliminated repeated search results, the corpus eventually amounted to 186 letters to the editor of *The Times*.

5. Data analysis

The analysis of the letters was performed using WordSmith Tools 8.0 (Scott 2020) and focused on the concordances of the keywords *Armenia*, *Armenian*, and *Armenians* and on their recurring clusters and collocations. This analysis attempts to address the research questions stated above, and to isolate the linguistic features of the public representation of the Armenian identity.

5.1 Word frequency

Searching the corpus wordlist for the adjectives and nouns referring to the Armenian national identity, a first sign of the cognitive dissonance (Mamali et al. 2019) that has affected the treatment of the Armenian genocide is detectable. By cognitive dissonance applied to the Armenian genocide, Mamali et al. (2019) refer to the characteristics of the two conflicting narratives on the genocide made by the victims on the one side, and by the perpetrators on the other. As the existing narratives on the Armenian genocide show, the narrative made by the victims seeks for public recognition of the events as genocide, while the narrative constructed by the perpetrators denies this. Therefore, a conflicting narrative of recognition vs. denial is evident. The polarity between the two sides, i.e., acknowledgment / recognition vs. denial, belonging to two opposing national identities, inevitably leaves traces in the linguistic expression of textual evidence that reports on it.

In particular, the wordlist shows *Turkish* (34th) as the first lexical item appearing on the list after the grammatical words, followed by *British* (45th), *government* (47th), *war* (48th), *Turks* (50th), and *Turkey* (51st). *Armenian* and *Armenia* rank 58th and 97th, with *Armenia* mentioned 141 times in 75 letters, and *Armenian* mentioned 247 times in 108 letters. Also, *Armenians* ranks 61st, with 227 mentions in 102 letters. The side in denial, i.e., Turks, is cited twice

as often as the side which seeks public recognition, i.e., Armenians (Mamali et al. 2019). This prefigures linguistic choices that might have affected the narration on the side of the victims (De Cillia et al. 1999). The analysis of concordance lines and most recurrent collocations and clusters of *Armenia*, *Armenian* and *Armenians* will examine the linguistic strategies in use within the conflicting narrative of the Armenian genocide, and attempt to establish whether they might somehow have reflected the concerted denial of the Turkish official statements.

5.2 Collocations and patterns of meaning

5.2.1 Armenia

The noun *Armenia* most frequently collocates with the coordinating conjunction *and*, repeatedly introducing coordinate collocates of locations (*Arabia*, *Mesopotamia*, *Syria*, *Palestine*) connected with the genocide. Since coordinating conjunctions connect constituents either belonging to the same class or sharing an equal status (Biber et al. 1999), coordination establishes a relationship of equality where each constituent is assigned the same semantic weight inside the extended co-text within which it is located. Being frequently mentioned together with other nouns related to national entities, Armenia is somehow deprived of an individual narrative, with the effect of diluting its prominence as geographical context of reference of the discursive creation of the Armenian national identity (De Cillia et al. 1999), weakening the side of the victim in the conflicting narrative of the events. Examples (1) and (2) provide evidence of this:

(1)   The trouble in *Armenia and Kurdistan* is that with the possible exception of the vilayet of Van the Christians are everywhere in a minority as compared with the Moslems.

(2)   The Save the Children Fund has, as a matter of fact, sent no relief to Berlin since September because, deplorable though the condition of the children still is in many German towns, the need for help is yet more desperate in *Poland and Armenia*, *Hungary and Vienna*.

In example (1) *Armenia* collocates on the right with the place name *Kurdistan* through the coordinating conjunction *and* while discussing what endangers the Christian populations of the Ottoman Empire. Example (2) shows how Armenia is one item in a list of places where help to children is needed.

The coordinating conjunction establishes an equal significance of the two coordinated place names; therefore, these and other coordinated collocations with national geographical entities suggest a general equivalence, with all entities sharing similar events and having suffered from similar violence, thus combining areas which instead had different stories during World War I. The frequency of the collocation *Armenia + and +* geographical entity suggests that pairing it with another national entity was quite common in the letters to the editor on the Armenian question and somehow denied Armenia the centre of the narration. The reasons behind this choice remain unknown; however, the frequency of this strategy is suggestive of an objective linguistic trait of the letters in the LEAQ corpus.

    Armenia also collocates frequently with the grammatical words *of* and *in* which occur in two recurring clusters that contain the two prepositional phrases *of Armenia and* and *in Armenia and*, whereby the prepositions left-collocate the node *Armenia*, which in turn right-collocates with the coordinating conjunction *and*. Both clusters reiterate the collocation with the coordinating conjunction, confirming the first objective trait explained above and adding more extensive examples of the seeming impossibility for Armenia to be at the centre of an individual narration. Following Partington's corpus-assisted approach (Partington 2004, 2010), in order to look for non-obvious meanings and to "extend the patterns of meaning" as suggested in Samson (2020: 283), the co-text of both clusters was investigated using the results of their concordances.

    Concordance lines of the cluster *of Armenia and* are shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Concordance with search cluster *of Armenia and*

N	Concordance
1	more horrible in the war than the treatment *of Armenia and* Syria, and he is right.
2	Allied troops to protect the Christian population *of Armenia and* Cilicia in the present
3	line of defence is formed by the forces *of Armenia and* Pontus. These two countries
4	not recognize that the age-long devastation *of Armenia and* massacre of her people

The most frequent collocates of the cluster *of Armenia and* are, on the left, common nouns (*treatment*, *population*, *forces* and *devastation*), and, on the

right, place names (*Syria*, *Cilicia*, *Pontus*) and a common noun (*massacre*). The lexical items *treatment*, *devastation* and *massacre* all belong to a semantic field of genocidal violence and connect Armenia with the actions that concurred to dismantle its national identity. The cluster is paired with other geographical entities (*Syria* and *Cilicia*) through the coordinating conjunction *and*, which reiterates the cognitive dissonance on the Armenian genocide (Mamali et al. 2019).

The sentence in example (3) shows further co-textual evidence:

(3)   The author of the article in The Times complains that there has been *nothing more horrible* in the war than *the treatment of Armenia and Syria*, and he is right.

The cluster *of Armenia and* collocates on the left with *the treatment*, which is an anaphoric reference of the negative evaluative phrase *nothing more horrible* that shows the writer's position (Hunston – Thompson 2000) using emotive parameters (Bednarek – Caple 2019). This left side of the cluster's co-text shows a narrative in favour of the victims in its use of negative evaluative language to describe the violence. Its right side, however, coordinates *Armenia* with *Syria*, presenting, as explained before, the frequent objective linguistic trait that weakens the narrative of the victims. Syria was actually the final destination for the Armenians who survived death marches, where they would be left to die in the desert. What seems to emerge is an uneven distribution of connotational meaning, whereby on the one side the narrative is openly supporting the victims, while on the other some language choices that weaken the previous support are made. This signals an underlying cognitive dissonance between contrasting attitudes, the frequency of which will emerge in the following analysis.

The same uneven distribution of connotational meaning occurs when attempting to examine the concordance of *in Armenia and*, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Concordance with search cluster *in Armenia and*

N	Concordance
1	whether the atrocities of which we hear *in Armenia and* elsewhere are all to be placed to
2	of the Turk from Constantinople. The trouble *in Armenia and* Kurdistan is that with the

3	cruelties practised against their fellow-Moslems *in Armenia and* Western Asia Minor, and
4	demanded an investigation of the occurrences *in Armenia and* Asia Minor by an impartial

Here *in Armenia and* collocates, again, with place names (*Kurdistan*, *Western Asia Minor*, *Asia Minor*). As Samson (2020: 288) points out, "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". As example (4) shows, *Armenia* collocates not only with other place names through the coordinating conjunction *and*, but with a more generic *elsewhere* that erases the cultural and national connotations of the geographical area:

(4)   And the question arises whether the *atrocities of which we hear in Armenia and elsewhere* are *all to be placed* to the credit of these Mahomedans […].

A recurrent structure of the sentences where *Armenia* is mentioned seems to emerge whereby, on the left of the keyword, nouns related to genocidal violence occur (*atrocities*), the evaluative impact of which is lessened by the right-collocates of the keyword (*elsewhere*). This structure reflects the cognitive dissonance on the Armenian genocide at sentence level: on the left, affirmation (naming the violence); on the right, in the more semantically charged position, denial conveyed through the use of generic place names, or through coordinating place names, as if to claim that Armenia was not the only place to suffer.

5.2.2 Armenian

The most frequent collocate of *Armenian* is, once again, the coordinating conjunction *and*, in line with the results for *Armenia*. The most frequent lexical right-collocates of *Armenian* are respectively *people*, *refugees*, *republic*, *state*, *massacres*, *nation* and *question*. Therefore, *Armenian* collocates with nouns referring to genocidal violence (*refugees*, *massacres*) and to politics (*people*, *republic*, *question*, *nation*). This suggests that the attributive adjective *Armenian* seems to be used with co-textual evidence that makes more explicit reference to the narrative of the genocide, because the term directly identifies the national identity of the victims and refers to its treatment, as

shown in example (5) below. In example (5), extended co-textual reference is provided following Partington (2004, 2013) wherein evaluative language is also italicised to show how the narrative of the victims is constructed through the linguistic choices signalling the stance of the author of the letter:

(5)   The experience of the last forty-five years has demonstrated that the *interference* of the Powers on behalf of the *Armenian people* has produced *an unbroken series of misfortunes*, making *ultimately* the position of *this people almost impossible*. No organized Government *would dare to renew* in its national affairs an experiment *which has signally failed time and again*. Then why should *such a cynical course* be adopted in regard to the *Armenian people*? Nevertheless, the Allied delegates have again been *urging upon* the Turks the *necessity* of allowing the return of the *refugees* to their homes in Turkey.

The collocation *Armenia + people* is repeated twice, and *people* is also repeated in an anaphoric reference of the first occurrence of the collocation. Italicised evaluative language shows the negative stance on the Allied intervention to settle the Armenian question, and the author of the unsigned letter, "An Armenian", ultimately suggests that Armenians and Turks should be better left alone in finding a solution to the conflict, in view of the negative consequences of the interventions so far.

Examples (6) and (7) below show further co-textual evidence of the collocation *Armenian people*:

(6)   The *rights* and the *effective protection* of the *minorities* in Eastern and Western Thrace and of the *Armenian people* are *by no means secured* by the agreement into which we have already entered with the Turkish Nationalists.

(7)   Sir,-The *danger* to the *remnant* of the *Armenian nation* which your Correspondent at Constantinople points out in his message in your issue of to-day is a *real*, an *urgent*, and a *terrible danger*. It *threatens* the *destruction* of the little republic at Erivan, which the Allied Powers themselves recently called into being by their official recognition of it; and it probably means the *extermination by the sword and by famine* of *so much of* the *Armenian people* as has survived from the *massacres* of 1915.

Both examples (6) and (7) use negative evaluative language to complain about the risks to which the Armenians are exposed by the political situation

and decisions undertaken by the Allied forces. This reinforces the hypothesis that the political sides of the Armenian question and the humanitarian implications of the genocide seem to be prevalent in the collocates with the attributive adjective of nationality *Armenian* in the collocation *Armenian* + noun. However, when examining recurrent clusters, the pattern affirmation *vs.* denial identified for *Armenia* seems to occur again, in particular when analysing the concordance lines of one of the most recurrent clusters, *Greek and Armenian*, shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Concordance cluster with search cluster term *Greek and Armenian*

N	Concordance
1	at that port in 1915, and against whom *Greek and Armenian* witnesses testified in Court
2	murder, rape, and butchery at the expense of the *Greek and Armenian* elements in Mersivan.
3	While I talked at length with the *Greek and Armenian* Patriarchs in Constantinople, I
4	at the Greek Consulate; at the homes of the *Greek and Armenian* Patriarchs;

Analysing the results in Table 4 above, the cluster *Greek and Armenian* collocates, on the right, with *witnesses*, *elements* and *Patriarchs*, and, among the lexical items on the left are *murder, rape and butchery*. Therefore, while some left-collocates introduce negatively connoted language referring to the genocide, right-collocates are nouns reflecting no evaluative connotational meaning. Here as well as in concordance lines of *Armenian + and*, the Armenian identity is paired with other national identities of the area where the genocide occurred, thus depriving Armenians again of their individual narrative as victims.

Placing neutral, factual lexical choices to the right, in the most semantically significant part of the sentence (Biber et al. 1999), reveals, at sentence level, the cognitive dissonance on the Armenian genocide. On the left, affirmation (naming the violence); on the right, in the more semantically charged position, denial (using generic place names, or coordinating place names to make it seem that Armenia was not the only place to suffer). This also discloses the choice of levelling the narrative of the genocide by coupling the victims with other national identities with the recurrent collocation national identity noun/adjective + *and*, with the coordinating conjunction either as left- or right-collocate.

Example (8) expands on co-textual references:

(8)   […] and in the telegram of October 26 there is an account of *murder, rape, and butchery* at the expense of the *Greek and Armenian elements* in Mersivan.

On the left, genocidal violence (*murder, rape, and butchery*), and, on the right, a more generic abstract noun (*elements*). It could possibly have been news jargon, but the sterile connotation of labelling massacred people as *elements* inevitably contributes to denying the victims the status of human beings, thus contributing, again, to the cognitive dissonance on the Armenian genocide.

5.2.3 Armenians

The last search involves the term *Armenians*, which is another term crucial to the construction of the discourse of the national identity (De Cillia et al. 1999), or to its destruction, depending on the surrounding contexts of use. The most frequent collocate is, again, the coordinating conjunction *and* (34 times occurring on the right), and the second most frequent collocate, both on the left (18 times) and on the right (12 times) is *Greeks*.

The concordance cluster list shows that the cluster *Greeks and Armenians* occurs 12 times and that the cluster *Armenians and Greeks* occurs 10 times. These coordinated nominalised adjectives of nationality seem to confirm the lexical strategy of pairing Armenian nation-related terms with other nation-related terms to deprive Armenians of their individual narration. However, the lexical elements associated with each pair are different, as Table 5 and Table 6 below show.

Table 5. Concordance cluster with search cluster term *Greeks and Armenians*

N	Concordance
1	accounts of the Turkish cruelties perpetrated on *Greeks and Armenians* during the war.
2	organization of the massacring of both *Greeks and Armenians* by the Turkish Government
3	have suffered more terrible oppression than the *Greeks and Armenians* have from Turkey.
4	reputable eye- witnesses of the killing of *Greeks and Armenians* in Smyrna before the fire

The cluster *Greeks and Armenians* co-occurs with collocates belonging to the semantic field of genocidal violence on the left (*cruelties*, *massacring*, *oppression*, *killing*), with two of them further pre-modified to state the responsibility (*Turkish cruelty*) and to intensify their evaluative connotation (*terrible oppression*). On the right, one time-related prepositional phrase (*during the war*); one denotative place-related prepositional phrase (*in Smyrna*); one connotative place-related prepositional phrase (*from Turkey*); a noun phrase where the attributive adjective acts as a metonym of the real agent behind genocidal violence (*the Turkish Government*). The repetition of words connected to Turkey seem to counterbalance the structure affirmation *vs.* denial identified before. There seems to be no room for denial, here, on the right side of the collocations, at least in lines 2 and 3 of the cluster concordance lines. Examples (9) and (10) expand on these two concordance lines and offer more co-textual evidence to investigate this linguistic feature:

(9)   The American Ambassador at Constantinople in 1915-16, Mr. Henry Morgenthau, was a first-hand witness as to the *deliberate organization of the massacring* of both *Greeks and Armenians* by the Turkish Government at Constantinople.

(10)   If there is a thing on which both branches, the British and the American, of the Anglo-Saxon race pride themselves it is their *championship of the weak and oppressed* and their *respect for their plighted word*. No races in the world have suffered *more terrible oppression* than the *Greeks and Armenians* have from Turkey.

Both examples evidence references to British and American national identities before mentioning the victims of the genocide with the cluster *Greeks and Armenians*. Example (9) explicitly mentions the American Ambassador and advocates for his first-hand account of the genocide, while in example (10) the author takes pride in claiming how *the Anglo-Saxon race* invariably comes to the rescue of victims worldwide. Mentioning the Turks at the right end of the sentence creates an opposition, a comparison with rescuers of the victims and perpetrators of the violence that serves to clarify the role of each side, and to explicitly blame the responsibility of the violence on the opposing side. The victims are placed on these two sides, and this distribution seems to reflect the actual situation of the political conflict between the Allied forces and the defeated Ottoman Empire as viewed from the British perspective of *The Times*.

Pairing the victims with a coordinating conjunction, however, weakens their narrative as victims for the implications already mentioned in previous occurrences of the collocation national identity noun / adjective + *and*, thus further underlining the absence of an individual narrative of the genocide in the LEAQ corpus.

Concordance lines in Table 6 show instead the recurrent cluster *Armenians and Greeks*:

Table 6. Concordance cluster with search cluster term *Armenians and Greeks*

N	Concordance
1	village on the chance of finding food. *Armenians and Greeks* are still being attacked
2	least of the evils which the ill-fated *Armenians and Greeks* of Asia Minor have suffered
3	in the ruthless persecutions of *Armenians and Greeks* and other subject rates of the
4	exaggeration of the figures of *Armenians and Greeks* alleged to have been massacred

The cluster *Armenians and Greeks* co-occurs with lexical items similar to those of the cluster *Greeks and Armenians* in terms of genocidal violence (*are still being attacked*, *evils*, *have suffered*, *ruthless persecutions*, *massacred*). Here, the structure affirmation *vs.* denial is still in place, with a displacement, a removal of the Turks from active subjects to agents of passive or state verb forms (*are still being attacked*, *have suffered*, *have been massacred*). Again, this seems to lessen the connotation of the nouns related to genocidal violence occurring on the left (*evils*, *persecutions*). Also, the attributive adjective *ill-fated* has a metaphorical connotation which shifts the focus from real, concrete, and planned human actions massacring the Armenians (and the Greeks) to a more divine-like intervention.

The adjective *ill-fated* makes implicit reference to the history of the Armenians and to their oppression under the Ottoman Empire, and, at the same time, seems to ascribe their suffering to fate, as if it is inscribed in the destiny of the Armenians to suffer. On a much more remote plan of interpretation, it blames the violence not on human actions but on an outer force that condemned Armenians to be persecuted, against which it is impossible to fight. This could even be an implicit way of discharging responsibility on the part of the international community who had seemed unable to intervene and stop the genocide.

In particular, example (11) indicates a claim made by Ameer Ali, the influential Indian Muslim politician, in the letter to the editor dated 17ᵗʰ October 1922, according to which crimes committed by the Christian minorities on Turks should be acknowledged too:

(11)   Apart from the *ludicrous exaggeration* of the *figures* of *Armenians and Greeks alleged* to have been *massacred* by the Turks, there is a *grim simplicity* about the *logic*.

Example (11) shows denial of the Armenian genocide by questioning the numbers of the victims, claiming that they are smaller than those declared by the international community. Hereby, again, the structure affirmation vs. denial is in place. The evaluative noun phrase that collocates on the left of the cluster (*ludicrous exaggeration*) collocates itself, on the right, with the prepositional phrase *of the figures* (Armenians and Greeks are figures, not people), and *exaggeration* is a cataphoric reference of another dehumanizing abstract noun (*figures*).

Another strongly evaluative lexical item (*alleged*) collocates on the right of the cluster, and it is acting on the denial side of the structure, doubting, on a semantic level, that the massacres even happened. This is a strategy to deny credibility of the Armenian claims towards recognition of Turkish genocidal actions because Ameer Ali and the Indian Muslim community want to express their support for the Turks by questioning the narration of the victims. Using the same narrative elements inside a conflicting narrative, they subvert the representation of the Armenians as victims and create cognitive dissonance to make the readers of *The Times* aware of the possibility of coexisting different versions of the same events.

6. Concluding remarks

The potential of letters to the editor for civic engagement and for exerting influence on social and political developments (Wahl-Jorgensen 2019) seems to have not been fully exploited by the letters of the LEAQ corpus, which failed to activate an intervention to end the Armenian genocide and to relieve Armenians of their sufferings. The corpus-assisted approach adopted for the analysis shows that the letters in LEAQ, mentioning the Armenian question from 1914 to 1926, present specific linguistic features that might have contributed to building the long-lasting cognitive dissonance on the Armenian genocide.

The most recurrent linguistic characteristics of the representation of the Armenian identity in LEAQ are language choices that reduce the impact of their content. This occurs through the repeated use of the coordinating conjunction *and* to pair Armenian national identity-related terms to other nationalities as well as to place names by the use of collocates with contrasting connotations on either side of the most recurrent clusters.

As to the "social amnesia" of the Armenian genocide, the organization of the constituents according to the pattern acknowledgement/request for public recognition *vs.* denial is a linguistic characteristic that seemingly contributes to the dismantling of the national claims of the Armenians at the textual level. These linguistic strategies seem to oppose the contents expressed in the letters and to reduce the impact of the pleas for relieving the sufferings of the Christian populations that were the victims of the genocide.

As to the linguistic features characterising the mediated news discourse in LEAQ, it would be beyond all factual interpretations to claim that such linguistic choices were intended to undermine the extent of the massacres. Perhaps the choice to refer to both Armenians and Greeks, thus comparing references to the Armenians with references to other people involved in the massacres, was intended to reinforce the impact of the genocide, and therefore to highlight the remarkable number of the victims, attaining an effect opposite to the one emerging from the analysis. According to this interpretation, the ideal intention was, therefore, to denounce the humanitarian emergency and the living conditions of refugees of not only one, but two or even more entire populations "relocated" from their homes.

Drawing some conclusive remarks should not exclude *a priori* all possible interpretations of the data. The recurring linguistic patterns isolated within the analysis of the nodes pertaining to the Armenian national identity indicate ambivalence in the representation of the Armenian question. When not mentioned in its humanitarian features, it seems to be reduced to one among the different socio-political instances involved in the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, thus weakening the perception of the identity of the population. Such ambivalence, if not overtly conveyed by the content of the letters themselves, still finds its way into the formulation of the content.

Further extending the analysis of LEAQ would certainly provide more material to complement these findings in order to understand how the Armenian genocide was framed for the readers, how the representation of the Armenian identity was constructed, and if the language choices adopted contributed to the century-long process of the denial of the Armenian question.

Unfortunately, dealing with historical news discourse makes it impossible to consult the living sources of the texts under examination, and the actual intentions behind observed linguistic phenomena remain inaccessible. Moreover, it is not within the scope of a linguistic analysis to formulate hypotheses that pertain to a broader socio-historical and political debate over the events referred to in the corpus.

REFERENCES

Sources

The Times and Sunday Times Online Archive
　　　　　　https://www.thetimes.co.uk/archive, accessed February 2022

Special studies

Alayrian, A.
　　2018　*Consequences of Denial. The Armenian Genocide*. London and New York: Routledge.
Astourian, S.
　　1990　"The Armenian genocide: An interpretation", *The History Teacher* 23 (2), 111-160.
Aybak, T.
　　2016　"Geopolitics of denial: Turkish state's 'Armenian problem'", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18 (2), 125-144.
Baker, P. – C. Gabrielatos – M. Khosravinik – M. Krzyzanowski – T. McEnery – R. Wolak
　　2008　"A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press", *Discourse & Society* 19 (3), 273-306.
Bednarek M. – H. Caple
　　2019　*News Discourse*. London / New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
Benwell, B – E. Stokoe
　　2006　*Discourse and Identity*. Edinburgh: Blackwell.
Biber, D. – S. Johansson – G. Leech – S. Conrad – E. Finegan
　　1999　*Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. Edinburgh: Pearson Longman.
Brownlees, N. – G. Del Lungo, – J. Denton (eds.)
　　2010　*The Language of Public and Private Communication in a Historical Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Cavanagh, A. – J. Steel (eds.)
    2019   *Letters to the Editor. Comparative and Historical Perspectives*. London:
            Palgrave Macmillan.
Chabot, J. – R. Godin – S. Kappler – S. Kasparian
    2016   *Mass Media and the Genocide of the Armenians*. London: Palgrave
            MacMillan.
Chovanec, J.
    2012   "From adverts to letters to the editor. External voicing in early
            sports match announcement". In: M. Palander-Collin – M. Ratia
            – I. Taavitsainen (eds.) *Diachronic Developments in English News
            Discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 175-197.
Conboy, M.
    2011   *Journalism in Britain. A Historical Introduction*. London: Sage.
Dadrian, V. N.
    2003   *The History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict from the Balkans to
            Anatolia to the Caucasus*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn.
De Cillia, R. – M. Reisigl – R. Wodak
    1999   "The discursive construction of national identities", *Discourse
            & Society* 10 (2), 149-173.
Elayyadi, H.
    2017   "Reconciliation process. How has the Turkish state's official discourse
            of the Armenian genocide evolved during the Erdogan era?",
            Armenian Journal of Political Science 2 (7), 77-94.
Elspass, S.
    2012   "The use of private letters and diaries in its sociolinguistic research".
            In: J. M. Hernández-Campoy – J. C. Conde-Silvestre (eds.)
            The Handbook of Historical Sociolinguistics. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell,
            156-169.
Fotopoulos, S. – M. Kaimaklioti
    2016   "Media discourse on the refugee crisis: On what have the Greek,
            German and British press focused?", *European View* 15, 265-279.
Hobbs, A.
    2019   "Readers' letters to Victorian local newspapers as journalistic genre".
            In: A. Cavanagh – J. Steel (eds.) *Letters to the Editor. Comparative and
            Historical Perspectives.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 129-146.
Hunston, S.
    2002   *Corpora in Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University
            Press.
Hunston, S. – G. Thompson (eds.),
    2000   *Evaluation in Text: Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse*.
            Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Kingsley, P.
    2019   "Erdogan's dismissive retort on Armenian genocide shows how low
            U.S. ties have sunk", *The New York Times* 30 October 2019.

Knightley, P.

    2004   *The First Casualty. The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Landert, D. – A. H. Jucker

    2011   "Private and public in mass media communication: From letters to the editor to online commentaries", *Journal of Pragmatics* 43, 1422-1434.

Lemkin, R.

    1944   *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mamali, C. – M. Kivu – J. Kutnik

    2019   "Conflicting representations on Armenian genocide: Exploring the relational future through self-inquiring technique", *Filozofia Publiczna i Edukacja Demokratyczna* 2 (8), 168-250.

Mayersen, D.

    2016   *On the Path to Genocide: Armenia and Rwanda Reexamined*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn.

Partington, A.

    2004   "Corpora and discourse, a most congruous beast". In: A. Partington – J. Morley – L. Haarman (eds.) *Corpora and Discourse*. Bern: Peter Lang, 9-18.

    2010   "Modern diachronic corpus-assisted discourse studies (MD-CADS) on UK newspapers: An overview of the project", *Corpora* 5 (2), 83-108.

    2015   "Corpus-assisted comparative case studies of representations of the Arab world". In: P. Barker – T. McEnery (eds.) *Corpora and Discourse Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 220-243.

Partington, A. – A. M. Duguid – C. Taylor

    2013   *Patterns and Meanings in Discourse: Theory and Practice in Corpus-assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Partington, A. – A. Marchi

    2015   "Using corpora in discourse analysis". In: D. Biber – R. Reppen (eds.) *The Cambridge Handbook of English Corpus Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 216-234.

Peltekian, K. M.

    2013   *The Times of Armenian Genocide. Reports in the British Press. Volume 1: 1914-1919, Volume 2: 1920-1923*. Beirut: Four Roads.

Pounds, G.

    2005   "Writers argumentative attitude: A contrastive analysis of 'letters to the editor' in English and Italian", *Pragmatics* 15 (1), 49-88.

    2006   "Democratic participation and letters to the editor in Britain and Italy", *Discourse & Society* 17 (1), 29-63.

Rafter, N.

    2016   *The Crime of All Crimes: Toward a Criminology of Genocide*. New York: New York University Press.

Romova, Z. – J. Hetet
    2012   "Letters to the editor: Results of corpus analysis", *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics* 18 (2), 45-63.
Samson, C.
    2020   "'The whole of Bengal is in revolt'. A corpus based analysis of letters from the 1857-58 mutinies in India", *Lingue e Linguaggi* 36, 283-296.
Scott, M.
    2020   *WordSmith Tools Version 8.* Stroud: Lexical Analysis Software.
Sinclair, J.
    1996   "The search for units of meaning", *TEXTUS* IX (1), 75-106.
    2004   *Trust the Text. Language, Corpus, and Discourse.* London: Routledge.
Tognini-Bonelli, E.
    2001   *Corpus Linguistics at Work.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins.
Üngör, U. Ü.
    2012   "The Armenian genocide, 1915". In: B. Boender – W. ten Have (eds.) *The Holocaust and Other Genocides. An Introduction.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 45-70.
Wahl-Jorgensen, K.
    2019   "Foreword". In: A. Cavanagh – J. Steel (eds.) *Letters to the Editor. Comparative and Historical Perspectives.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, v-x.
Wodak, R. – R. De Cillia – M. Reisigl – K. Liebhart
    2009   *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* (2nd edn.). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Address: ISABELLA MARTINI, Department of Education, Languages, Intercultures, Literatures and Psychology, Via S. Reparata 93-95, Università degli Studi di Firenze, 50129 Firenze, Italy.
ORCID code: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6086-3313