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When *possible* does not always mean "possible": Evaluative patterns of newsworthiness in letters to the editor

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of letters to the editor (LTE) calls for more research on the linguistic construction of their newsworthiness, particularly when letters are used to foster debate on controversial issues. The connection between newsworthiness and the language of evaluation has been studied quite extensively using corpora (Hunston 2011; Bednarek – Caple 2019). However, limited research has been performed on corpora of LTE to investigate their linguistic features (Pounds 2006; Romova – Hetet 2012). A small but significant corpus of LTE of *The Times* written between 1914 and 1926 on the Armenian question was selected to investigate their evaluative patterns of newsworthiness. Word frequency, collocational patterns, clusters of evaluative lexico-grammatical items and their semantic connotation were examined, also in relation to elements of the grammar of modality, with a specific focus on the evaluative adjective "possible" in its attributive and predicative uses. Understanding the linguistic strategies that contributed to keep alive the debate on those events provides further insights into the acknowledgment of the Armenian genocide.

Keywords: Letters to the Editor; Corpus Linguistics; News Discourse; Evaluation; Historical English.

1. Introduction

A considerable amount of textual material has been published on the Armenian genocide, both as first hands accounts, in form of diaries or interviews books, and news articles and letters to the editor (LTE) of international newspapers, such as *The Times*. As Peltekian (2013) remarks

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in the introduction to her collection of news articles and letters to LTE collected from the British press, the massacres of the Armenians were documented by war correspondents on a regular basis and kept alive in the section dedicated to the letters to editor of newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The Times*.

As a form of mediated news discourse, LTE are ascribable to a genre with specific textual features that are worth investigating through a corpus-driven linguistic approach (Tognini-Bonelli 2001; Sinclair 1996, 2004). The Letters to Editor on the Armenian Question (LEAQ) small corpus of 186 LTE published between 1914 and 1926 was built from the online archive of *The Times and The Sunday Times* (https://www.thetimes.co.uk/archive/), which hosts the complete collection of the articles published between 1785 and 1985. Letters were selected using the key words *Armenia* and *Armenian* (the latter includes also mentions of *Armenians*) and has been analysed to collect corpus-driven quantitative and qualitative evidence on the evaluative language (Hunston – Thompson 2000) and the semantic prosody or evaluative connotational meaning (Sinclair 2003; Morley – Partington 2009) used to construct the newsworthiness (Bednarek 2006, 2010; Bednarek – Caple 2017, 2019) of the events connected to the Armenian situation in those years.

The question of the Armenian "relocation", i.e., the outbreak of violence on the Armenian residing in Anatolia between 1915 and 1918 (Elayyadi 2017), came back into international news when the war in the Nagorno-Karabakh area broke out in 2020, and the Armenian residents were forced to leave the area. While the Armenian genocide is being given more and more international recognition (Astourian 1990, Aybak 2016), Turkey denies responsibility for the Armenian genocide, ascribing the deportation and the massacre of around 1,5 million Armenians to the natural occurring events of the concurring First World War (Alayrian 2018).

LTE mentioning the Armenian question in the 20th century have not been analysed using a linguistic approach yet; building a corpus of letters mentioning the Armenian question and performing analyses on its linguistic features provides further research materials to answer two research questions:

- How was the reading public influenced in their perception of what was to be identified as the first genocide of the 20th century? And how was the language of evaluation used to construe news items as newsworthy and relevant in order to do so?

- With the Armenians striving to have the memory of the genocide recognised and kept alive, which linguistic strategies, if any, might have contributed to its general oblivion?

After a brief introduction of the historical context, the paper outlines the theoretical and methodological framework applied to the corpus of LTE. Then the construction of the corpus will be explained, and the evaluative patterns of newsworthiness discussed. The analysis will focus on the most recurrent evaluative adjective *possible* and on its attributive and predicative occurrences (Biber et al. 2007) in collocational patterns and clusters (Hunston 2002). Concluding remarks on further research paths are provided at the end of the paper.

2. The Armenian genocide. Some contextual information

On 24th April 1915, notable personalities of the Armenian minority living under the Ottoman rule were murdered in Istanbul; simultaneously the order was issued to kill Armenian men throughout the Ottoman empire, and to force the remaining members of the Armenian families to leave their homes and villages and march towards the Syrian desert. Civilians were forced to walk through villages with no one allowed to help them, exposed to constant brutality in a mass deportation that immediately caused international concern thanks to war correspondents and to high profile Armenians and international citizens living in those areas, who informed the international community of the atrocities perpetrated on the Armenians on a regular basis (Alayarian 2018).

Despite articles and LTE continuously mentioning the killings and the conditions of the deported Armenians in the international press, the Turkish government denies responsibility for the genocide (Chabot et al. 2016; Elayyadi 2017; Mamali et al. 2018). The Young Turks achieved a preeminent position in the years immediately preceding World War I and contributed to ignite the nationalist trend of the majority of the inhabitants of the empire. This led to the desire to "turkify" the Empire by removing the Christian minorities living within its borders – Armenians and Greeks, mostly – and to the wholesale massacre of civilians belonging to these minorities (Alayarian 2018; Mayersen 2016).

As outlined in the next section, news coverage of the events contributed to remind the international community of the crimes perpetrated by the

Ottoman government; LTE were used to keep the debate ongoing and to provide a space for high profile contributors to keep their memory alive.

3. Letters to the editor. Genre and corpus linguistics

LTE have achieved the status of a genre of its own within media discourse studies because of their peculiar features (Cavanagh 2019). Started as a space to share hard news, they later became a privileged space to share opinions and to make one's opinion known to the public. LTE ensured their writers not only visibility, but also recognition as a voice worth listening to (Hobbs 2019). This particularly happened in broadsheet newspapers such as *The Times*; high profile contributors could either respond to a specific matter or initiate a new conversation on a topic selected for its public significance (Brownlees et al. 2010).

LTE are usually written by members of the reading public of a newspaper, and their main aim is to communicate the writer's views'. Published letters sometimes undergo an editorial process that alters the authorial voice, thus creating a mediated news discourse suitable to reinforce the editorial line of the newspapers where they are featured, and to guide the reading public towards a specific reaction, thus generating a guided debate that mirrors the contents published in the newspaper (Richardson – Franklin 2004; Pounds 2006). LTE published on broadsheet newspapers, however, serve a wider and more strategic aim, as usually those are newspapers where matters of international politics are discussed by their actual protagonists, and where the debate in the empowered space dedicated to the LTE makes public what is otherwise privately discussed (Cavanagh 2019).

Despite their relevance to the construction and the performance of cultural citizenship (Cavanagh 2019), as well as their role in the construction of the media discourse in newspapers through the centuries (Hobbs 2019), and their availability in digitised formats, LTE have not been frequently analysed through a corpus linguistic approach, with the exceptions of Chovanec (2012), Romova and Hetet (2012) and Pounds (2005, 2006). Among these, Pounds (2006) examined the language of evaluation in the LTE in different cultural contexts (Italian and British), and her analysis provided insightful data on LTE as a tool of democratic participation and public engagement that contributed to the study conducted in this paper.

The rationale behind the creation of the corpus and the methodological framework of the analysis will be explained in the next section, with

a specific focus on the parameters of the news discourse value analysis used to examine the evaluative function of adjectives in the corpus.

4. The language of evaluation applied to the LEAQ corpus

The language of evaluation has been the object of extensive linguistic research. A seminal formulation of the concept was made by Hunston and Thompson (2000); according to them, evaluation refers to "[…] the expression of the speaker's or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions [statements] that he or she is talking about. That attitude may relate to certainty or obligation or desirability or any of a number of other sets of values" (Hunston – Thompson 2000, p. 5). Evaluation expresses the speaker/writer's opinions, thus reflecting their value systems and those of their community; it serves to construct relationships between speakers and readers; and it helps to organise texts (Hunston – Thompson 2000).

The appraisal system developed by Martin and White (2005) further contributed to clarify the function of the language of evaluation in the LEAQ corpus. The features of the commentator voice (judgement, affect, appreciation) used to either condemn or praise, and their associated values of positivity/negativity were particularly useful to understand the evaluative stance of *The Times* on the matters discussed in the letters. These were put in relation with further studies on how corpora are used to conduct studies on evaluation and evaluative phraseology in a variety of text types (Hunston 2011; Gozdz-Roszkowski – Hunston 2017). Phraseology, as pointed out by Hunston (2011, p. 5) "describes the general tendency of words, and group of words, to occur more frequently in some environments than in others". Therefore, studying the co-text, i.e., the environment, of evaluative lexical items and their collocates and clusters helped to better understand the textual strategies of the LTE making up the LEAQ corpus.

When applied to news discourse, the study of the language of evaluation can be used to understand the evaluative stance of the news institution, how it reflects its news values, i.e. what makes something newsworthy, its relationship between readers and news writers, and its way of organising news stories (Bednarek 2010). Using a corpus approach to study the evaluative language in the news, parameters of evaluative language have been identified that contribute to newsworthiness (Bednarek 2006; Bednarek 2010) and eventually conflated in the Discursive News Value

Analysis (DNVA), an approach developed by Bednarek and Caple (2017; 2019) to understand how newsworthiness is constructed through different semiotic sources.

A corpus-driven (Tognini-Bonelli 2001; Sinclair 1996, 2004) quantitative and qualitative approach allowed me to identify the most recurrent evaluative adjectives out of the general word list obtained with WordSmith Tools 8.0 (Scott 2020) of the LEAQ corpus. Evaluative adjectives are used to express the position writers take towards their content, and they serve as an explicit or implicit signal of their stance. Therefore, they could be regarded as linguistic items that are frequently used to influence the perception of readers on a certain news item. The corpus-driven analysis provided quantitatively relevant evaluative adjectives; the analysis of their most frequent concordances and collocates followed, without any preconceived concepts orienting the choice of the items to be analysed apart from their frequency in the corpus. A corpus-driven approach is particularly relevant in this research, because it allows data to emerge directly from the analysis of the corpus.

5. De-constructing newsworthiness through the analysis of the language of evaluation

The Letters to Editor on the Armenian Question (LEAQ) corpus was collected from the digital online archive of *The Times and The Sunday Times*. Hosting the complete collection of the articles published between 1785 and 1985 matches the standard of completeness in corpus building (Hunston 2002). The letters were selected using two significant search words, *Armenia* and *Armenian*, the latter including also letters where the term *Armenians* occurs. This resulted in collecting all the letters to the editor where the Armenian question was mentioned over a span of twelve years, from 1914 to 1926. This span of time was selected to also attempt a reconstruction of the context immediately before the onset of the genocide and after, and to see how and if any linguistic signals could be detected that could somehow anticipate the events of 1915.

The LEAQ corpus amounts to 186 letters for a total of around 120,000 tokens. The letters were downloaded in both PDF and OCR formats; the OCR files were edited and compared with corresponding PDF files to ensure correctness, renamed with their date and page of publication, and saved as UTF-8 TXT files. Digitised files were then processed using WordSmith Tools v.8.0 (Scott 2020) to obtain a wordlist out of which the most

recurrent evaluative adjectives were isolated; due to the limited number of texts featured in the corpus, the selection could be done manually. Table 1 exemplifies the most frequently occurring evaluative adjectives:

Table 1. Most frequently occurring evaluative adjectives in the LEAQ corpus

	N	Word	Freq.		N	Word	Freq.
1	184	POSSIBLE	69	11	457	STRONG	30
2	245	GOOD	55	12	471	SUPREME	29
3	253	RECENT	53	13	492	INDEPENDENT	28
4	264	CERTAIN	51	14	519	SIMILAR	26
5	272	OLD	50	15	525	OFFICIAL	26
6	284	OBEDIENT	47	16	529	COMPLETE	26
7	288	KNOWN	47	17	550	HIGH	25
8	294	NECESSARY	46	18	560	TERRIBLE	24
9	302	LONG	45	19	578	COMMON	24
10	417	IMPORTANT	33	20	621	IMPOSSIBLE	22

The first recurrent evaluative adjectives (*possible*, *good*, *recent*, *certain*, *old*) could be ascribed to different parameters taken from the classification by Bednarek (2010) (possibility, positivity, recency or timeliness, unambiguity, and again recency or timeliness), which expands and further defines Hunston and Thompson (2000) and Martin and White (2005). However, other parameters could be attributed to the results from the key word list, namely necessity (*necessary*, *essential*), emotivity (*terrible*, *unfortunate*, *disastrous*), importance (*important*), expectedness (*certain*, *known*, *clear*, *expected*), as well as comparators (*different*), following the work of Hunston and Thompson (2000), or unexpectedness (*different*), following again the most recent work by Bednarek and Caple (2019). Often, however, more parameters are applicable to the same adjective, depending on the various evaluative meanings associated to the adjective itself and depending on its context of use.

Parameters from different studies by Bednarek (2006, 2010) were used, as her recent works with Caple (Bednarek – Caple 2017, 2019) draws and selects from her more extensive set of parameters; also, some recurrent adjectives, such as the most recurrent adjective *possible* was difficult to fit into her latest selection of parameters per se (consonance, eliteness, impact, negativity, personalisation, proximity, superlativeness, timeliness, unexpectedness). These evaluative parameters are used to analyse media discourse in the new and are here applied instead to analyse LTE.

For the limited scope of this article, the analysis is focused on the most recurrent evaluative adjective *possible* and on its different evaluative meanings in predicative and attributive grammatical structures (Biber et al. 2007), following Samson (2006), to study its occurrences in the ideally "unmediated authorially sourced judgement" (Martin – White 2005) of the LTE of the LEAQ corpus.

The study of *possible* allows one to understand how the newsworthiness and relevance (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002) of the topic was construed in the LTE using the news value parameter of superlativeness (Bednarek 2010; Bednarek – Caple 2017, 2019), and the concept of evaluative connotational meaning as outlined in Morley and Partington (2009) and relying on semantic prosody (Sinclair 2003), in relation also to lexico-grammatical collocates pertaining to the grammar of modality (Halliday – Matthiessen 2014). Further research activity is already planned to build on the results of the analysis presented in this article, and to examine other more and less frequently occurring evaluative adjectives in the LEAQ corpus in order to contribute to the study of the local grammar of evaluation and of the linguistic and textual features of the letters to editor.

5.1. Possible – attributive use

As previously anticipated, among the evaluative parameters singled out by Bednarek and Caple (2017, 2019), *possible* is not clearly ascribed to one of the news values conferring newsworthiness. However, its leading position in the LEAQ corpus needs a more in-depth analysis to understand the reasons behind its frequency. *Possible per se* might be associated to the parameter of possibility and of reliability as formulated by Bednarek (2010) in her methodological framework of evaluation in the news, following Hunston and Thompson (2000) in connection with the evaluative parameter of certainty, and to hedging and its related aspects of modality (Martin – White 2005; Hunston 2011; Halliday – Matthiessen 2014). Among the four rules for selection of the content of LTE, namely relevance, brevity, entertainment, and authority (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002), the rule of relevance to the events and the rule of authority are those along which the LEAQ corpus seems to be organised. In view of its small size, an overall individual reading of the texts was indeed possible. Also, thanks to WordSmith Tools 8.0 (Scott 2020), it is possible to add a diachronic perspective to the analysis, to verify if changes in the evaluative connotational meaning of *possible* occurred in the span of time under consideration, in view of the evolving events surrounding the Armenian question.

Concordances for *possible* in the LEAQ corpus can be automatically listed in ascending chronological order, following file naming with the day and page of publication of each letter to the editor; therefore, Table 2 shows the first concordances of *possible* appearing in the corpus.

Table 2. Chronologically first occurrences of *possible* in the LEAQ corpus

provided for. These are being cared for as far as **possible** for the moment by the Russian Armenian inhabitant
ocal committees, are rendering all the assistance **possible,** but they have no funds left, all the money subscr
thorities are separating the fugitives as much as **possible,** as it is feared there may be an outbreak of disea
f Easterns, I should like to state as strongly as **possible** that the inhabitants of the Ottoman dominions, be
nt in the Ottoman dominions. It is, however, just **possible** that their repetition in a letter to The Times ma
in the conduct of Balkan affairs. It is not only **possible,** but highly probable, that mistakes may have been
plete change of Ministers. I dare say it would be **possible** for a partisan politician, or even for one not an
ve still to learn that such redress as may yet be **possible** has been made for that act of murder. Americans a

These first occurrences all appear in 1915. More specifically, the first three occurrences appear in the same letter published on 12 January 1915, some months prior to the actual start of the massacres in April in that same year. It is worth remembering that the selection of the span of time preceding the actual massacres was intended to detect some potential signs that the Armenian massacres were possibly anticipated by other events reaching the news. This appears to be the case in this first letter, titled "The Armenian Red Cross", where the evaluative adjective *possible* first occurs in the sentence in Example 1:

(1) "These are being cared for as far as possible for the moment by the Russian Armenian inhabitants, who are themselves very poor owing to floods having spoilt their last crops".

This first occurrence shows an attributive structure whereby *possible* is pre-modified by a comparative adverbial structure, that is repeated in other

subsequent occurrences. The anaphoric reference of the deictic subject pronoun *these* is to be found in the short preceding sentence, "There are now 12,000 Armenian refugees at Sarikamysch alone to be provided for." Who were those refugees? Why were they refugees? What were they trying to escape? Further information is added on the conditions of the refugees after Example 1, explaining why they are being cared: "Hundreds of old men, women, and children have tramped through the snow without shoes or stockings, these articles having been seized by Turkish soldiers, who had been billeted in their houses".

This first occurrence of *possible* is part of a comparative adjectival structure whereby a sense of limitation, or a sense of reaching a limit of achievability is expressed. This same evaluative sense is also conveyed by the other two occurrences of *possible* inside this first letter, that is to say *all the assistance possible* and *as much as possible*. Example 2 and example 3 provide the context where they occurred:

(2) "The Catholices (head of the Armenian Church) and his clergy, with local committees, are rendering all the assistance possible, but they have no funds left, all the money subscribed by Armenians having to go to the upkeep of the volunteers".

(3) "The Russian authorities are separating the fugitives as much as possible, as it is feared there may be an outbreak of disease, owing to their famished and impoverished conditions".

In Example 1 and Example 3 above, both attributive adverbial phrases are post-modifying a verb phrase ("[The refugees] are being cared of" and "are separating [the fugitives]"), in which the action expressed by the verb seems to reach its limit of achievability with both evaluative adjective phrases, implying also, to some extent, a limitation of responsibility, due, in this case, to the lack of funds. Therefore, if efforts have reached their limit of feasibility, then it might be argued that whoever is responsible for making those efforts is somehow discharged of the responsibility towards the need to make more efforts, seemingly having fulfilled their responsibilities at the same time. The same paradoxical connotation is expressed in Example 2 through the structure *quantifier* + *article* + *noun* + *possible* (as much as possible). The connotation assigned to these attributive structures relying on adverbial comparisons and quantifiers is used to convey the evaluative meaning of limitation of feasibility, which, together with a limitation to responsibility seems, however, also a call for receiving help.

The same connotation is also expressed in one of the most frequent collocates of *possible*, the quantifier *every*, located in its immediate L1 position. Table 3 below reports the results in context of the collocational pattern *every* + *possible*:

Table 3. Attributive collocational pattern every + *possible*

ed to our country, I will continue to help in **every possible** way as I have done in the Senate in the last two
he mandate, while those same Powers imposed **every possible** restriction on its own action, going so far as to
ould allow such licence to an avowed enemy. **Every possible** means should be employed to combat the inference
le for massacres of defenceless Christians. **Every possible** means should be taken to indicate to these bloodt
d to be able to assure our subscribers that **every possible** precaution is taken that our gifts shall reach th
al that we should work towards that goal by every **possible** means. As for present-day Russia (continues the a

The phrase *every* + *possible* further collocates with nouns (along the structure *quantifier* + *adjective* + *noun*), of which the most frequent is *every* + *possible* + *means*; the same cluster *every* + *possible* collocates in turn with *way*, *precaution* and *restriction*. Example 4 shows one example in its context:

(4) Every possible means should be taken to indicate to these bloodthirsty outlaws of the centuries that Christian civilised men will not shake hands with them, or have any sort of intercourse with them.

The use of the quantifier in Example 4 and in Example 2, but also the adverbial comparisons in Example 1 and 3 are clearly related to the news value parameter of superlativeness, according to which "the event is constructed as being of high intensity or large scope/scale" (Bednarek – Caple 2019, p. 93), the extent of which can be "established through the linguistic resources of intensification and quantification" (Bednarek – Caple 2019, p. 93). Therefore, intensifiers such as *as much as*, *as far as*, *all the*, *every* contribute to the newsworthiness of *possible* in its attributive construction by recurring to an intensification of the event to which these attributive occurrences of *possible* are related.

5.2. Possible – predicative use

The evaluative meaning of *possible* conveyed through its predicative use in the other first six occurrences from 1915 shown in Table 2 above, and occurring in four different letters, relies instead on the grammar of modality and on gradability, and is differently connoted. Example 5 shows the fifth occurrence in its context, from a letter by Lord Cromer titled *Germany and the East. Lord Cromer's Warning*. Actually, within the context of the letter, this is the first occurrence of *possible*, despite the fact that in the results provided by WordSmith Tool v.8.0 (Scott 2020) this occurrence is listed as fifth occurrence, and not as fourth, as it should be.

(5) It is, however, just possible that their repetition in a letter to The Times may arrest the attention of some who are interested in Eastern affairs and who are fortunate enough to be living for the time being in countries which admit of the circulation of news and of opinions. (The Times, 30 July 1915, p. 7)

Among the letters of the LEAQ corpus, this one is not included in the collection by Peltekian (2013), and it reports a reply by Lord Crewe in the House of Lords which may "arrest the attention" of the readers, appealing to their interest and to their solidarity, as well as to their deeper understanding of political dynamics underlying the responsibility of the German army, that did not interfere with the "wholesale massacre and deportation" carried out in Armenia. In this case, *possible* is used within a predicative construction to suggest the chance of this piece of news, otherwise restricted to the House of Lords, to be spread and to be trusted, particularly because it is authored by an authoritative voice. Moreover, this structure corresponds to the first pattern of the grammar of evaluation mentioned by Hunston and Sinclair (2000) to recognise evaluative adjectives (*it+ link verb + adjective group + clause*), which is also the same structure of the occurrences 6 to 8 of Table 2.

Example 6 shows the use of the evaluative adjective in the same letter, integrating the grammar of modality of a predicative structure with an attributive comparative adverbial structure (*as strongly as*), to reinforce the strength of the authorial voice:

(6) As one who has passed the best years of his life in the East and takes the deepest interest in the moral and material welfare of Easterns, I should like to state as strongly as possible that the inhabitants of

> the Ottoman dominions, be they Moslem or Christian, have nothing whatever to hope from the establishment of German predominance in their midst.

With the evaluative adjective *possible* being pre-modified by a comparative adverbial structure, qualifying the verb *state*, the intention behind the use of such a structure is to claim a strong position, a challenging political position that was relevant to the target reading audience of the letters in the historical context of World War I. The Armenian genocide, here, is used to reinforce accusations towards the German enemy, by adding a complementary perspective to the context of World War II.

The analysis of the left- and right-collocates of *possible* adds further insight into how it was used to express evaluative meanings inside the LEAQ corpus. Most frequent collocates in R1 position are *that*, *for*, while *every* is the most recurrent collocate in L1 position, as discussed before. As shown in Table 3 below, the collocational pattern with *that* highlights the predicative use of *possible*, both in the positive structure *it + link verb + adverb + possible + that*, and in the cluster based on the interrogative structure *link verb + it + possible + that*. The positive structure, instead, shows that the affirmative strength of *possible* is often graded through an adverbial pre-modification, such as with *quite* or *just*, making it similar to its use with modal verb phrases (*may*, *would*) or with future verb phrases (*will*). Table 4 shows the collocational pattern with *for* in R1 position:

Table 4. Collocational pattern *possible + for*

large areas of Europe and Asia Minor. Would it be **possible for** you to write a letter, either to myself or ot
including 150,000 refugees from Asia Minor. Is it **possible for** public opinion in Great Britain indifferently
provided for. These are being cared for as far as **possible for** the moment by the Russian Armenian inhabitant
." If America rejects them " it will no longer be **possible for** America to exercise effective influence in th
ned to irresponsible articles and speeches it was **possible for** moderate Mahomedans in India to argue that th
iversities are also crammed to overflowing. Is it **possible for** the Government, who represent the ratepayer a

plete change of Ministers. I dare say it would be **possible for** a partisan politician, or even for one not an
passed and nothing has been done. (2) To make it **possible for** the Armenians of Van, &c., who are now crowde
ower in the hands of this country it would not be **possible for** Constantinople, lying under the guns of the A

In this case, *possible for* collocates with place names used as personifications (Constantinople, America), a national group (Armenians), a religious group (moderate Mahomedans), socio-political lexical items (a partisan politician, the Government, public opinion), and to form a prepositional phrase of time (for the moment). In most cases then, *possible for* is constructed as *adjective* + *for* (+ *article*) + *noun*, with the noun introducing another term into the discourse, who is potentially in charge of performing a certain action, as shown in Example 6, allowing a future course of action (Hunston – Thompson 2000) and hinting at an ideational metafunction (Halliday – Matthiessen 2014):

(6) Is it possible for public opinion in Britain indifferently to envisage the further destruction of so many homes and live, and fortunes, amounting to many hundreds of millions?

This example, from a letter by E.K. Venizelos, i.e. Eleftherios Kyriakou Venizelos, a prominent leader of the Greek national liberation movement, also mirrors the most recurrent cluster, *link verb* + *it* + *possible* + *that*, with the that-clause replaced by a prepositional phrase (for + noun) delaying the to-infinitive clause, and emphasising the components of the clause (the prepositional phrase *in Britain* and the evaluative adverb phrase *indifferently*). Analysing also other occurrences of *possible* + *for* + *noun*, and particularly its left and right collocates, it is evident that the same interrogative structure emerges whenever a call to action is claimed.

The predicative structure of *possible* in the LEAQ corpus, therefore, seems to occur to question a certain course of action, and to instil in the audience an element of doubt, which is mostly what the grammar of modality achieves. Indeed, by recalling potentiality (Halliday – Matthiessen 2014), the adjective *possible* adds explicit and high polarised subjective evaluation that convey the writer's position, despite the scarcity of evaluative adjectives retrieved in the LEAQ corpus.

As seen in the examples, the use of the evaluative adjective *possible* in the LEAQ corpus does not comply with the news value parameter of possibility but tends to be associated more with the news value parameter of superlativeness in its attributive form, and to the grammar of modality in its predicative form, with an overlapping of the two when reinforcement of the evaluative meaning intended to convey is needed. The attributive structure, with the use of comparisons and quantifiers, conveys a sense of limitation, as if the limit of feasibility concerning the noun of the attributive structure has been somehow reached, and nothing else can be done – apart from veiled call for help aimed at the readership, or through the readership, of the letters, particularly when *possible* left-collocates with the quantifier *every*. Instead, the evaluative meaning associated to the predicative form of *possible* acquires a moral connotation, conveying the writer's opinion on what should have morally been done, particularly after the onset of the genocide.

It is indeed not only the alternation of attributive and predicative evaluative meanings, but also the chronological distribution of these local structures which adds to the local grammar of evaluation of the corpus. These types of evaluation seem to occur in two different moments in relation to the events of the Armenian Question. The attributive meaning of *possible*, with its intrinsic value of limitation, seems to occur at the same time of the massacres, or in the immediate aftermath. The predicative meaning of *possible*, instead, with the moral accusation implied by its collocates and by the contexts where it is featured, seems to occur more frequently in later years, as strong criticism of what has been done, or of what has not been done, until then. However, further extensive research should be done in order to verify more accurately these trends.

An ambivalent use of the evaluative adjective *possible* therefore appears to be in use, with an evolution from an evaluative meaning of limitation in its attributive use, to an evaluative meaning critical of the current situation and envisaging future courses of action in its predicative use. The discursive news value of the evaluative adjective *possible* not only relied on two opposing meanings, but, in view of its frequency, is a dominant value of the news discourse inside LEAQ, insofar as it creates a structural evaluative ambivalence. Therefore, the attributive use of *possible* is then related to making conclusive statements, whereby, if everything possible has been done, the meaning attached to this evaluative use of possible leads to a general discard of responsibility. Blame, or at least a moral connotation is expressed by the

predicative use of *possible*, according to a dialectic of disclaiming *vs*. claiming, discharging responsibility *vs.* charging with responsibility, that alternates throughout the corpus.

6. Concluding remarks

On the basis of the analysis performed so far, the LEAQ corpus shows features that possibly contribute to understand the linguistic reception and subsequent acknowledgment of the Armenian genocide. LTE are usually based upon a reaction to certain news items, but, in turn, they contribute to generate a reaction in the audience, according to how their newsworthiness is linguistically constructed through the use of evaluative language. The two different evaluative meanings emerging from the attributive and the predicative collocational structures of *possible* are organised along a polarised continuum between limitation of achievement and blame for lack of achievement, expressed through the attributive collocates (quantifiers, comparison) and through the predicative collocates (affirmative and interrogative forms, that-clause, prepositional phrase *for+noun*), which, sometimes, are also blended inside the same sentence.

Limiting the scope of the analysis to one single evaluative adjective and to its collocational patterns provided a significant example of the evaluative lexico-grammatical structures that in the LEAQ corpus contribute to the linguistic features of LTE that construct newsworthiness. However, the textual construction of newsworthiness in the LTE of the LEAQ corpus needs to be examined further to better understand which of its linguistic features were most used to influence the perception of the reading public. The polarised continuum between limitation of achievement and blame for lack of achievement identified with the analysis of possible seems indeed to suggest an underlying collective perception of the events that might emerge when extending the analysis to other recurrent evaluative adjectives. Isolating further lexico-grammatical features that contribute to the construction of newsworthiness in the corpus would also help to better understand whether some linguistic strategies adopted by the international press, somehow, might have contributed to the oblivion of the Armenian genocide. Ultimately, the LEAQ corpus represents not only a sample of the public debate on the events surrounding the Armenian genocide, but also an example of the language of LTE in use around the first decades of the 20th century in a British broadsheet newspaper.

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