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Analysing the Semantic Prosody of Timeliness in Letters to the Editor of *The Times* on the Armenian Question from 1914 to 1926

Abstract

The Armenian genocide of 1915-1923 (Dadrian 2003) had a massive international news coverage at the time of the events and in the decades that followed (Peltekian 2013; Elayyadi 2017), but few linguistic studies have examined its news discourse. None, so far, has analysed the letters to the editor commenting on the genocide and on the Armenian question at large. Letters to the editor, intended as specific news discourse, rarely have been targeted by linguistic studies (see Chovanec 2012; Romova and Hetet 2012; Pounds 2005; 2006). A corpus of 186 letters to the editor of The Times, published between 1914 and 1926, was collected to examine the linguistic strategies used to construct the newsworthiness of the Armenian genocide through the news value of timeliness. Timeliness is here intended as the recency in time of the events that are commented in the letters to the editor. The concepts of evaluation (Hunston and Thompson 2000), of evaluative parameters in media discourse (Bednarek and Caple 2019) and of semantic prosody (Partington 2004; Sinclair 2004) are applied to most recurrent lexical items related to timeliness (recent, new, last), analysing their concordances and collocates, thus combining discourse analysis with a corpus-driven approach (Tognini-Bonelli 2001; Sinclair 1996, 2004). The findings show the linguistic features of the semantic prosody of timeliness in the corpus.

Keywords: *Corpus Linguistics, news values, letters to the editor, evaluative language, historical English, semantic prosody*

1. Introduction

International news outlets covered the massacres of the Christian minorities (mainly of Armenians and Greeks) under the rule of the Ottoman Empire which started on 24th April 1915 and lasted until 1923 in their most violent outbreak (Aybak 2016; Astourian 1990). First-hand accounts of the deportation and massacre of an estimated 1,5 million Armenians (Alayrian 2018) were provided by international war correspondents and by letters to the editor published in the major broadsheet newspapers circulating internationally (Peltekian 2013). Letters to the

editor usually help to maintain a certain topic newsworthy for the reading public by commenting on the topic discussed in a news article or in an editorial article. Letters to the editor can also comment on a topic which has not been mentioned in the newspaper recently, but that is considered worthy of receiving the attention of the newspaper's editor by the author of the letter (Richardson and Franklin 2004). The letters that are selected to be published, among the many that do not make it to print, allow to better understand the agenda of a newspaper on the topic commented on in the published letter (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008). There are specific features of a letter to the editor that orient the decision of the editor to publish it or to discard it (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002), as Section 3 below explains. Among these features, letters complying with news values intended as “the factors that take an event into the news” (Bednarek and Caple 2019, 50), are more likely to be selected for publication. Among these factors, timeliness is perhaps the most crucial for letters to the editor. Published letters usually comment on events that are temporally relevant to the reader—recent events, seasonal events (Christmas, summer holidays, etc.)—or to a piece of news that might not be recent, but that is considered relevant to the news agenda of a newspaper (Bednarek and Caple 2019). Therefore, the letters to the editor published in *The Times* on the massacres of the Armenians started in 1915 demonstrate that this topic was considered relevant and timely both to the readers and to the news agenda of the *The Times*. However, the linguistic features of the letters to the editor commenting on the Armenian question (Mayersen 2014), that would later be known as the Armenian Genocide, have never been studied before.

This paper aims to contribute to the existing linguistic research on the language of letters to the editor by analysing recurrent evaluative language used to express the news value of timeliness, and its related semantic prosody. To perform this task, a corpus of 186 letters to the editor of *The Times* published between 1914 and 1926 was built. The letters were selected from the online archive of *The Times and The Sunday Times* using *Armenia* and *Armenian* as search words. The corpus is referred to as LEAQ (Letters to the Editor on the Armenian Question) and it comprises around 120,000 tokens. Combining corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, this paper tries to answer to two research questions:

- What are the most recurrent lexical items conveying the news value of timeliness in the LEAQ corpus?
- What kind of semantic prosody is expressed through their recurring phraseology?

After a brief outline of the historical context provided in Section 2, Section 3 explains the theoretical and methodological framework of the quantitative and qualitative analysis conducted on the evaluative language (Hunston 2011; Hunston and Thompson 2000; Hunston and Sinclair 2000) and on the semantic prosody (Partington 2004) of frequent lexical items expressing the news value of timeliness (Bednarek and Caple 2019; Bednarek 2010, 2006) in the LEAQ corpus. The features of the LEAQ corpus will be discussed in Section 4, while in Section 5 the findings of the analysis are examined.

2. Contextual outline of the Armenian Genocide

The commemoration of the 1915 Armenian Genocide (*Medz Yegern*) is celebrated annually on 24th April, when the massacre of the Armenian residents of the former Ottoman empire was initiated (Alayarian 2018). Notable Armenian personalities were executed first, followed by male Armenians accused of fomenting civilian unrest against the Ottoman rule. Then all Armenians were given a day's notice of eviction from their homes and were forced to march towards the Syrian desert. Armenian women, children, and elders were escorted across the Empire, left to starve and exposed to brutalities on the part of the Turkish army, anticipating the infamous death marches of the Holocaust (Rafter 2016; Dadrian 2003). The German allies of the Ottoman Empire were witness to the violence but they did not interfere (Battisti 2016). While such violence was perpetrated, news of the massacres reached the international community on a regular basis, thanks to war correspondents, political personalities residing nearby, international humanitarian workers who were in the area because of the ongoing World War I, and to letters to the editors of major international newspapers (Mamali et al. 2019; Elayyadi 2017; Chabot et al. 2016; Peltekian 2013). The cause of the genocide is said to lie in the desire to "Turkify" (Üngör 2012) the empire and eliminate the Christian minorities (mostly Armenians and Greeks), thus confiscating their homes and wealth. As reported by Alayarian (2018) and Mayersen (2014), the genocide of Armenians was not the first wide-scale massacre of the Christian minorities in the Ottoman empire, with the Hamidian massacres dating back to 1895-96, and persecution and ethnic violence being rather common throughout the empire. The news of the massacres reaching the international community and stimulating an international debate through the letters to the editor seemed to have not contributed to prevent further violence (Chabot et al. 2016). Section 3 will discuss some features of the news discourse of letters to the editor, with a focus on the news value of timeliness and its evaluative connotation in LEAQ.

3. The news discourse of letters to the editor

Despite being a traditional outlet to voice the opinions and comments of the reading public of newspapers, letters to the editor have rarely been the object of corpus linguistics research aiming at understanding their linguistic features. So far, only few works (Chovanec 2012; Romova and Hetet 2012; Pounds 2006, 2005) have dealt with corpora of letters to the editor for the purpose of linguistic research, but none of them with letters to the editor published before 1985. Letters to the editor have been studied from different research perspectives, such as their relevance to the performance of cultural citizenship (Cavanagh 2019); their contribution to the media discourse of newspapers (Hobbes 2019); and their significance as a social practice for the construction of the public (Wahl-Jorgensen 2002). According to Wahl-Jorgensen (2002) there are four ‘rules’ according to which letters to the editor are selected and published in a newspaper: they must be either *relevant, brief, entertaining, or authoritative*. The LEAQ corpus allowed for a check of the individual letters, which met two out of these four criteria, namely relevance and authority. All letters were published with relevance to the Armenian events in the selected time frame 1914-1926, and most of them are signed by political personalities of the time. As for the other two criteria mentioned by Wahl-Jorgensen (2002), brevity and entertainment, a few letters are brief, but none of them could be considered entertaining. According to Bednarek (2010, 2006) and Bednarek and Caple (2019), events are determined worthy of being reported in the news only if they present some specific content features: the so-called news values. In view of their analysis of the news discourse, recurrent news values in newspaper articles are negativity, timeliness, proximity, prominence, consonance, impact, novelty, superlativeness, and personalization. The linguistic features of news articles can be analysed through the framework of the parameters of evaluation developed by Bednarek (2010; 2006) and refined by Bednarek and Caple (2019) following Hunston and Thompson (2000), that helps to analyse how the point of view of the author is expressed.

The analytical framework of the parameters of evaluation mentioned above is applied in this paper to the letters to the editor of the LEAQ corpus; a specific analytical framework has still to be developed in order to examine the linguistic features of letters to the editor, intended as a specific “opinion genre” of the news discourse (Bednarek and Caple 2019, 115). Out of the news values defined by Bednarek (2010; 2006) and by Bednarek and Caple (2019), letters to the editor seem to rely mostly on timeliness. In order to be published, they have not only to be relevant to a topic, but they have to come in while the events to which they are related are still of interest to the readers – and to the editors. In other words, in order to be published, letters to the editor have to reinforce the newsworthiness of the piece of news they are referring to, or to come in

when editors decide to revamp certain events, in a timely manner. Editors are still the gatekeepers in traditional news outlets, selecting which letters to publish among the multiple voices of their audience (Pounds 2006; 2005; Wahl-Jorgensen 2002). Timeliness, intended as a news value, relates to the extent to which “an event is temporally relevant to the reader”, as opposed, for instance, to proximity, which concerns “the geographical and/or cultural nearness of the event” (Bednarek and Caple 2019, 53). The Armenian events between 1914-1926 do not seem to hold the value of proximity for the readers of *The Times*, because they are neither geographically nor culturally near to them (Bednarek and Caple 2019), although a partial cultural nearness could be traced back to the shared Christian roots. It would be interesting to compare how explicit timeliness and implied proximity are constructed in the LEAQ corpus through the semantic prosody (Partington 2004) of words expressing both news values of timeliness and proximity. This would go beyond the scope of this paper, but it is certainly worth of further research. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the news discourse has evolved in the past centuries, up until the latest evolution brought about by social media (Facchinetti 2021; Facchinetti, et al. 2015). Therefore, studying the linguistic features of the news discourse of letters to the editor published in different historical moments would help to better understand how their linguistic and textual features evolved over time.

4. The LEAQ corpus

The Times and *The Sunday Times* digital online archive is the source of the LEAQ corpus. Hosting the complete collection of articles published from 1785 and 1985, the online archive complies with the criteria of completeness¹ for corpus building. The span of time selected for the study, between 1914 and 1926, allowed to investigate the semantic prosody of timeliness of the Armenian Question before and after the conventionally established span of time where the genocidal violence occurred, i.e., 1915-1918, with some violent episodes reported until 1923 (Dadrian 2003). Compared to Peltekian (2013), the LEAQ corpus is not limited to letters specifically dealing with the Armenian massacres and their aftermath. As already mentioned above, the corpus includes 186 letters to the editor mentioning either the keywords *Armenia* and *Armenian*, with the latter including matching results for *Armenians* as well. The LEAQ corpus features around 120,000 tokens, including stopwords, and was processed with

¹ According to Hunston (2002), the source of the texts used to build a corpus has to be complete, meaning that there must not be gaps in the original collection of texts; for instance, a newspaper archive must have all the past issues of the selected time frame for the corpus, and all the issues must be complete in all their parts.

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 includes also extracts from regional and national newspapers, to obtain a keyword list of the LEAQ corpus. Keywords in a corpus are those words that are unusually frequent if compared to their frequency in a reference corpus (Scott 2020). Thus, the comparison between the frequency of each word in the LEAQ corpus wordlist with the frequency of the same words in the wordlist of the reference corpus gives the keywords of LEAQ. The keywords extracted from LEAQ are mostly nouns and adjectives relating to nationality, and place names. Table 1 shows the first eight relative most frequent keywords by their ranking position on a 500 keyness scale:

Keyword	Freq.	%	Texts	RC. Freq.	Log_L	Log_R
TURKISH	398	0,34	110	1.408	3.362,95	7,72
TURKS	271	0,23	100	463	2.618,85	8,77
ARMENIANS	227	0,19	102	95	2.611,98	10,80
ARMENIAN	247	0,21	108	258	2.567,76	9,48
TURKEY	266	0,23	90	2.014	1.880,96	6,62
CONSTANTINOPOLE	166	0,14	62	249	1.637,64	8,95
ARMENIA	141	0,12	75	322	1.296,60	8,35
GREEKS	145	0,12	53	694	1.147,24	7,28

Tab. 1: LEAQ keywords

LEAQ keywords are all related to the specific nationalities involved in the Armenian question between 1914-1926. These most recurring keywords are apparently not related to the news value of timeliness under examination in this paper, because none of them explicitly expresses the concept of recency in time. Therefore, in order to understand the semantic prosody of timeliness in the corpus, the wordlist obtained with WordSmith Tools v.8.0 (Scott 2020) was searched for the most recurrent words that conveyed the meaning associated with timeliness, that is, those most frequently used in the LEAQ corpus to convey a meaning of recency in time which are *recent*, *new*, and *last*. Concordances were compiled and the evaluative language associated to the nodes was analysed to examine the semantic prosody of the news value of timeliness in LEAQ. Despite the existing controversy over the concept of semantic prosody

(Partington 2004; Sinclair 2004), which will be explained in Section 5 below, examining the semantic prosody of *recent*, *new*, and *last* seemed suitable to understand the evaluative connotation of timeliness in the LEAQ corpus.

5. Analysing the semantic prosody of the news value of timeliness

Semantic prosody is related to the connotational/evaluative meaning of words, whether viewed as the expression of a consistent discourse function (Sinclair 2004), or as consistent co-occurrence of linguistic items, or of types of linguistic items (Partington 2004). It is also referred to as semantic preference by Hunston (2007) and Bednarek (2008). Due to the limited number of texts included in the LEAQ corpus, the attempt to establish a semantic prosody of the three nodes (*recent*, *new*, *last*) following Sinclair (2004) and to determine their general discourse functions did not lead to statistically significant results. However, a semantic prosody of timeliness can indeed be established following Partington (2004) by examining the consistent co-occurrence of linguistic items in the concordance lists compiled for each node (*recent*, *new*, *last*). The evaluative connotations of the immediate phraseology of the three nodes were therefore analysed. To better understand how the semantic prosody (Bednarek 2008; Hunston 2007; Partington 2004; Stubbs 2001) of timeliness was lexically constructed in LEAQ, concepts were selected from previous research on evaluative language Bednarek 2008; Hunston 2007; Partington 2004; Stubbs 2001). (The features of the commentator voice (judgement, affect, appreciation) that can be used to condemn or praise, and the values of positivity/negativity associated to the three features discussed in Martin and White (2005) were applied to understand the features of the comments made by the authors of the letters. The study of the relationship embodied by the text between writer and readers (Hyland 2005) and of the letters viewed as externally authored texts in the newspaper (Chovanec 2012) were combined with the studies on stance and evaluation conducted through the analysis of corpora (Godzdz-Roszkowski and Hunston 2017; Hunston 2011; Hunston and Sinclair 2000). Newspapers reveal their stance, i.e., the attitudinal dimension and the features “which refer to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgements, opinions, and commitments” (Hyland 2005, 176), in a range of explicit or subtle ways. This can be done through the selection of the letters to be published; through language choices in collocations, that is the words that tend to co-occur with the word(s) under analysis; or through grammatical structures (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008). Therefore, if word choices indicate the stance of the writer/newspaper, the assignation of discourse prosodies can change, expand, or contract the meaning of the terms in focus.

The following section will discuss corpus-driven evidence of the news value of timeliness and its related evaluative language. It investigates whether a semantic prosody (Partington 2004) of timeliness can be established in the corpus, and how it was used to engage the readers of *The Times* between 1914 and 1926. Collocations with the three chosen adjectives (*recent*, *new*, and *last*) are analysed in their attributive use as modifiers of the nominal expressions they precede (Biber et al. 2007) in clusters, co-textual occurrences on either side, and expanded concordances.

5.1 Recent

As explained in Section 4, letters to the editor rely on recency to be published; this means that they comment on recent events to comply with the news value of timeliness (Bednarek and Caple 2019; Bednarek 2010, 2006). The most frequent adjective in the LEAQ corpus expressing the concept of recency in time is *recent*. In its attributive use (ADJ + N), *recent* collocates with nouns related to time (*day*; *history*; *past*; *years*); to happenings (*action*; *events*; *lecture*; *luncheon*; *visit*); to politics (*war*; *retreat*; *overthrow*; *controversies*; with the phrase *diplomatic transaction*); to communication (*communication*; *correspondence*; *discussion*; *debate*; *issues*; *petition*; *response*; *speech*; *statement*; *telegrams*; *testimonies*). *Recent* also collocates with evaluative nouns and phrases related to violence (*Armenian atrocities*; *horrors*; *regrettable incidents*; *regrettable massacres*). While no clusters were found through WordSmith Tools v.8.0 (Scott 2020), the most frequent collocation, and the only pattern found, was **recent + events** in the attributive use of *recent*. According to WordSmith Tools dispersion plot, that shows the distribution of the word under examination in the corpus, *recent* seems to appear most frequently in the opening paragraphs of the letters in LEAQ, while the collocation **recent + events** is more likely to be found after the first half of the letters (6 occurrences out of 7). Table 2 shows the concordance list of the collocation **recent + events**:

- | |
|---|
| 1. fully realized in this Country that recent events have, for the time being, entirely <u>changed</u> |
| 2. conditions, which have been <u>dislocated</u> by recent events , but, given the guarantee of security, |
| 3. <i>massacres in Cilicia</i> . It was not to those very recent events , which may not yet be generally known |
| 4. has been some <i>exaggeration</i> in alluding to recent events and in <i>criticizing</i> our <i>misfortunes</i> . |
| 5. TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES. Sir,- Recent events in <i>Anatolia</i> spell the failure - let us |
| 6. the Allies remains entirely <u>unaffected</u> by recent events . It is now, no less than hitherto, |
| 7. under of our Smyrna-Greek policy, thanks to recent events <u>we are still</u> a Power in Turkey, and though |

Tab. 2: Concordance list of the collocation **recent + events**

As the following examples illustrate, the concordance lines of the collocation **recent + events** suggest two types of semantic prosody expressed by of the commentator voice, one praising and the other condemning (Martin and White 2005) the co-text evidence of the collocation. Underlined in lines 1, 2, 6, and 7 are words closely related to the collocation **recent + events** that express a semantic prosody of change (*changed; dislocated; unaffected; we are still*). Italicized in lines 3, 4, and 5 are words expressing a semantic prosody of negativity (*massacres; exaggeration; misfortunes; spell the failure*), thus expressing evaluation alongside the parameter of (negative) emotivity (Bednarek and Caple 2019). Since the aim of this paper is to investigate the language of evaluation connected to the news value of timeliness in relation to the Armenian question, a larger portion of the co-text of concordance lines 3 and 5 of Table 1 above will be examined, in order to verify the polarization of praise/condemnation of the language in use as well.

Example (1) provides the co-text of concordance line 3, from a letter published on 11th March 1920 and titled “ARMENIAN MASSACRES. INDIAN MOSLEMS AND TURJEY”:

- (1) TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES. Sir-In a letter published in your issue of to-day, Mr. Ameer Ali complains that I stated last week that the Moslems of India had not, as far as I knew, condemned the massacres in Cilicia. It was not to those very **recent events**, which may not yet be generally known in India, that I referred, but to the far more extensive and horrible massacres perpetrated by the Turkish Government in 1915, in which nearly a million of Christians perished, men, women, and children.

The collocation **recent + events** has a double function of both anaphoric and cataphoric reference, and it refers, in both cases, to the plural negatively emotive noun *massacres*. The parameter of emotivity of *massacres* is reinforced by the intensifier *far more* preceding two coordinate adjectives *extensive + (and) + horrible* that further qualify the noun as negative. Also, the location of the events is provided (*in + Cilicia*), and further negative qualification is added by another evaluative lexical items (*perished*) expressing the news value of negativity by adding the number of the massacred (*nearly a million*), which expresses the news value of superlativeness. It could then be assumed that the voice of the commentator (Martin and White 2005) condemns through the co-textual sequence of the node.

Example (2) shows the co-text of concordance line 5, published on 12th September 1922 and titled “WAR IN ANATOLIA. ALLIED PLEDGES TO GREEKS”:

- (2) TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES. Sir, -**Recent events in Anatolia** spell the failure - let us make no mistake about it - of Anglo-Saxon policy; and failure in some of those

things that we have cherished as among its most honourable and distinguishing features. 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.

In Example (2), the phrase **recent + events** left-collocates with a prepositional phrase (*in + Anatolia*) that adds details on the location of the events. The prepositional phrase is immediately followed by the negatively connoted verb form *spell*, and by another negative noun (*failure*), which is repeated as theme of the coordinate sentence that follows. Both **recent + events** and *failure* semantically anticipate of the last sentence reported in the example. There, the reason why the author of the letter claims the failure of the Anglo-Saxon policy in Anatolia is explained with reference to the fact that the Anglo-Saxons were unable to stop the *terrible oppression* suffered by Greeks and Armenians from the Turks. Again, the evaluative language associated is negatively polarised, and condemns what surrounds the recent events mentioned in the letters. It might also be remarked that *events*, in the case of this strong use of emotive language, seems to be used as hypernym of *massacres* in the examples analysed. Such a relation of hypernymy could be traced also in the co-text of other concordance lines, which points out a prevailing semantic prosody of condemnation surrounding the collocation **recent + events**. As mentioned before, *recent* collocates with nouns related to time, happenings, politics, communication, and violence. Table 3 shows examples of *recent + N-time*:

1.	high-spirited adherents to Islam, who were until recent days our strongest supporters in the East.
2.	achievement which towers like a peak above all recent historical exploits. " He does not like non-Turks
3.	their waning prestige. Who can <u>blame</u> them, given recent history and national vanity, for inferring
4.	The Times, is none too well acquainted with the recent history of the Near East, should have given
5.	a protest, a glance, on the other hand, at the recent past may not be out of place. In 1914 the Armenian
6.	consideration shown them by the Greek Government in recent years , in spite of the <u>frightful sufferings inflicted</u>
7.	more we learn of the inner history of the very recent years , the more manifest this tendency becomes
8.	<u>amazement</u> and <u>horror</u> upon the Turkish <u>massacres</u> of recent years , beginning 1805, followed by the deportation

Tab. 3: Concordance list of the collocation **recent + past**

From these concordance lines, the semantic prosody of condemnation and the occasional

semantic association with the massacre of the Armenians seems to be confirmed by co-textual occurrences such as *blame* (line 3), *frightful sufferings inflicted* (line 6), *amazement and horror upon the Turkish massacres* (line 8), all expressing a semantic prosody of negative judgment through the parameter of (negative) emotivity (Bednarek and Caple 2019). Expanding the co-text of concordance line 5, the connection is complete, as seen in example (3) below, published on 26th July 1923 and titled “THE ARMENIAN REMNANTS”:

- (3) Sir,-May I request the hospitality of your columns to say a few words on the future of the Armenians as it appears on the eve of the signing of the peace with Turkey ? There is no intention of filing a protest against the conduct of the Allied Powers towards the Armenian people. Such a proceeding might have seemed expedient in the heroic days of post-Armistice rhetoric, but not at the present period of “economic” solutions. While recognizing the futility of such a protest, a glance, on the other hand, at the **recent past** *may not be out of place*. In 1914 the Armenian people in Turkey, prosperous and strong, occupied a unique position in many respects. To-day, mainly owing to causes best known to the Governments of Britain and France, the remnants of our people are scattered throughout the Near East, mostly homeless and poor.

Example (3) is reliant on timeliness and on time-related units of meaning (*on the future of; on the eve of; in 1914; to-day*), to support the newsworthiness of the letter. And again, **recent + past** acts as an understated hypernym for the massacre of the Armenians. Moreover, it collocates with *may not be out of place*, thus relying on the grammar of modality (Halliday, Matthiessen 2014) to convey evaluative meaning, and, ultimately, harsh criticism.

The same semantic prosody is detectable in example (4), expanding on the co-text of concordance line 8, published on 4th October 1922 and titled “CHRISTIANS OF ASIA MINOR. AN AMERICAN BISHOP’S STATEMENT”:

- (4) I believe-although, of course, I may be mistaken-that the above cablegram correctly represents the sentiment of the Christian Churches of America, which have looked with increasing amazement and horror upon the Turkish massacres of recent years, beginning 1805, followed by the deportation and death of over half a million Christians in 1915, followed by the Samsun deportations of over 70,000 Christians described by Major Yowell and Dr. Ward, and now followed by the wiping out of the Christian quarter of the great city of Smyrna and the practically open statement by the Turks that they will deport or exterminate all the Christians remaining in Turkish Asia Minor.

The collocation **recent + years** is connected to evaluative language responding to the news

values of negativity (*horror; massacres; deportation; deportations; death; wiping out; deport; exterminate*) and superlativeness (*increasing*). The semantic prosody of this unit of meaning, and of this node (*recent*), is again ascribable to a strong condemnation of the events. The combination of *recent* and a noun expressing timeliness (here *years*) acts again as hypernym of the events happened in those years. The node *recent* also directly collocates with evaluative language, as shown in Table 4 below.

1.	Bryce yesterday in the House of Lords on the <u>most</u> recent Armenian atrocities will not reach the ears of
2.	which has just achieved its liberation, whilst recent horrors committed against it are passed over
3.	write to you to express my anxiety concerning the recent regrettable occurrences at Jerusalem, and
4.	and anxiety. India is seething with rage over recent " regrettable incidents;" and here a wild

Tab. 4: Concordance list of the collocation **recent + evaluative phraseology**

Here the node *recent* openly connects the news value of timeliness with those of negativity (*atrocities; horrors; regrettable*) and of superlativeness (*most*), reinforcing a semantic prosody of condemnation of the events it refers to by openly qualifying them as *regrettable* in the two occurrences not directly related to the Armenian massacres (*occurrences; incidents*). It should then be noted that the concept of novelty expressed through the adjective *recent* in its attributive form involves a semantic prosody of negative judgment, and when collocating with time nouns and with openly evaluative language of emotivity, the collocation **recent + N** acts as hypernym of negative events, frequently referring to the Armenian massacres. Upon close examination of the concordances of *recent*, no use in predicative forms is detectable in LEAQ.

5.2 New

New is the most frequent synonym of *recent* that was examined in the LEAQ corpus to study the semantic prosody associated with the news value of timeliness.

New collocates in its attributive use as **new + N** with geo-political nouns (*Armenia; boundaries; capital; International; kingdom; Russia; States; Turkey; World*) and in the name of the city of New York; this latter occurrence will be, of course, disregarded for the analysis. In its attributive use, *new* also collocates with nouns related to politics, or that are used with a political meaning when looking at their co-text occurrences (*scheme; commitments; development; dispensation; form; idea; lease; mobilization; nationalism; Parliament; policy; possessions; responsibilities;*

situation; spirit; status; violation; war). It also collocates as **new + ADJ + N** still in geo-political phrases (*American + influence; Arab + power; Armenian + state; Caucasian + states; Russian + Government; "Triple + Alliance"; Turkish + state*). Most frequent collocates, apart from grammar words, are *spirit* and *Turkey*. It is also worth remarking that *new* collocates with occurrences related to Turkey, and not only with *Turkey*, as listed in Table 5 below:

1.	ne who knows anything of the psychology of the " new Turk " – quite a different being from the " old
2.	it. For all his rather naïf disingenuousness the new Turk is a vain and simple soul, with a
3.	Government. Whatever be the boundaries of the new Turkey some Christians must continue to live un
4.	212.) I give no opinion as to the honesty of the new Turkish <u>assurances</u> as to the future now so
5.	s afforded them - and no wonder. I dwell on this new Turkish <u>spirit</u> because shortly England will be
6.	he guarantees for all the many minorities in the new Turkish <u>State</u> that were laid down in the Treaty
7.	has, to deal - and that force is undoubtedly the new Turkish <u>spirit</u> , which, at present, seems to be

Tab. 5: Concordance list of the collocation **new + Turk***

New seems then to be used to convey novelty related to the transformation of the Ottoman Empire and of its inhabitants. When used in the latter collocation, it is imbued with negative judgement, conveyed by co-textual occurrences (*psychology; different; naïf disingenuousness; vain and simple soul*). Further co-textual occurrences and more collocates need to be examined to understand the evaluative connotation of **new + Turkey** and **new + Turkish**. They are shown in Table 6 below:

1.	and were being hailed as the apostles of a new and regenerated Turkey . That was a happy time
2.	has recently been in Turkey and studied this new nationalism on the spot will agree with me
3.	JOHN GIBRALTAR. KEMAL'S " ASIATIC " POLICY. THE NEW SPIRIT IN TURKEY . BISHOP OF GIBRALTAR'S WARNING
4.	plead for ? Neither they nor we ask for any new status for Turkey . We consider it, however,

Tab. 6: Concordance list of the collocation **new + evaluative connoted references to Turkey**

Table 6 shows how *new* seems to suggest a positive attitude towards the change happened in Turkey; whether ironic or not, extended co-textual evidence is to prove that. The co-textual evaluative meaning of the phrase *new + and + regenerated + Turkey* is made clearer when looking at example (5), (6) and (7) listed below, all taken from a letter published on 7th

September 1917 and titled “SALONIKA MEMORIES. LEAVES FROM AN ARCHITECT’S NOTE-BOOK.” Example (5) includes the opening of the letter; example (6) is taken from a later sentence where *newly + awakened + zeal* acts as an anaphoric reference through repetition of the phrase under examination *new + and + regenerated + Turkey*. Example (7) is the conclusion of the letter, which makes further use of a negative semantic prosody of timeliness by mentioning the adjective *present* with the negative evaluative adjective *hideous*, both preceding the noun *war*:

- (5) TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES. Sir,-The account by your Correspondent of Salonika **before** the fire is interesting, and so much has been destroyed, or is in danger of destruction, that your readers may like to know something more of what is, or was, to be seen there. My knowledge of the place goes back not only **before** the fire, but **before** the Balkan Wars, when the Young Turks were in the first flush of victory, and were being hailed as the apostles of a new and regenerated Turkey. **That** was a happy time for students of architecture and antiquity, both at Salonika and Constantinople.
- (6) At the west end of the main street was a fine gateway largely composed of fragments from ancient buildings - but it was pulled down, **within a month after I had sketched it**, by the Young Turk in the fervour of his newly awakened zeal for progress and enlightenment, in order that a tramway might run over its site.
- (7) How much of all this, that made Salonika a place of charm and delight, will survive this **present hideous war**, which has wrought such destruction among the monuments of art in France and Italy, and now, whether by accident or malice we do not know, in this scene of our pleasant travel only seven years ago?

All examples are based on the comparison between present, and timely for the reader, events in Salonika and past events. The author’s openly stated aim is to provide readers with an account of what was to see in Salonika, currently known as Thessaloniki, before the great fire of 1917. Present events are associated with language of negative emotivity (*destroyed; destruction; hideous*), while the past is described using positive emotivity (*happy + time; fine + gateway; charm; delight*). With the text establishing a comparison between a negative present and a positive past, the phrase *new + and + regenerated + Turkey* suggests a negative judgment according to which the Young Turks were the agent of a change to the worse. Therefore, the use of *new* is associated to an ironic semantic prosody in this case. The irony is reinforced in example (6), in the phrases *in the fervour of* and *newly awakened zeal for progress and enlightenment*. The use of the nouns *fervour* and *zeal*, with their intrinsic connotation of extremism and fanaticism, negatively connotes the nouns *progress* and *enlightenment*, suggesting an ironic

semantic prosody for *newly*. The contrary of *progress and enlightenment* will result from actions implemented under the *new fervour* and *zeal* brought about by the Young Turks. For the same reason it also ironically connotes the participle adjective *regenerated*.

Another use of *new* is expressed in line 4 of Table 6, taken from a letter published on 6th June 1919 and titled “THE FUTURE OF TURKEY. APPEAL FROM MOSLEM LEADERS. THE PRIME MINISTER’S PROMISE.” Example (8) below provides co-text to the **new + N** occurrence *new + status (+ for + Turkey)*:

- (8) What do the Musulmans want; what do we plead for? Neither they nor we ask for any **new status for Turkey**. We consider it, however, our duty to urge, for the fair name of England, nay of the British Empire, that the pledge our Prime Minister in the name of England gave to the world, and in particular to the world of Islam, should be maintained; and that the Turkish sovereign, as the Caliph of the vast Sunni congregation, should be left in absolute possession of Constantinople, Thrace, and Asia Minor stretching from the north of Syria proper along the Aegean coast to the Black Sea-a region “predominantly Turkish in race.”

Underlined are phrases that correlate with the request (*want; plead; ask*) to maintain a current situation (*status*) for which Turkey has *absolute possession* of the former territories of the Ottoman Empire. In this occurrence the idea of novelty is rejected, expressing the view of Muslim Indians for whom *new* is associated to negative political changes to be avoided, expressed through a semantic prosody of negativity.

Lines 2 and 3 of Table 6 will be discussed by expanding on the lexical collocation **new + spirit**. Since *spirit* is another most frequent lexical collocates of *new*, Table 7 shows its concordance lines:

1.	JOHN GIBRALTAR. KEMAL’S “ ASIATIC ” POLICY. THE NEW SPIRIT IN <u>TURKEY</u> . BISHOP OF GIBRALTAR’S WARNING
2.	compassion. Do we expect that after this a “ new spirit ” will inspire the League of Nations!?
3.	it, and was what we thought he was. But now a new spirit is abroad – a reactionary, intolerant
4.	has, to deal - and that force is undoubtedly the new Turkish spirit , which, at present, seems to be
5.	afforded them - and no wonder. I dwell on this new Turkish spirit because shortly England will be

Tab. 7: Concordance list of the collocation **new + spirit**

Four out of five concordances (the exception is line 2) are extracted from of a single letter published on 8th November 1922, titled “KEMAL’S ‘ASIATIC’ POLICY. THE NEW SPIRIT IN

TURKEY. BISHOP OF GIBRALTAR'S WARNING.” The excerpt in Example (9) below provides a better understanding of the co-textual evaluative meaning of the word *spirit*:

- (9) The Turk whom we English have known for more than half a century was rather a fine fellow. We knew him for instance, under Williams at Kars then, as our ally, in the Crimea. We admired the fight he put up against Russia in the seventies,' and thought the defenders of Plevna were made of good stuff. We saved him then from Russia, giving him a new lease of life, and perhaps he deserved it, and was what we thought he was. But now a **new spirit** is abroad – a reactionary, intolerant Nationalism of hatred and dislike, of contempt and rejection of European nations and notions. There are many tokens of this.

The words underlined qualify as negative judgement, therefore adding negativity to the news value of timeliness, as seen in the concordances of *recent*, thus subverting the hypothesis of a positive attitude towards the perception of the Turkish situation at the time. Surely, the aftermath of *World War I* had a significant influence on the evaluative language associated to geo-political situation. In order to further investigate that, the analysis of the concordances with *Armenia* and *Armenian* will be considered, including immediate right-collocates, and further collocates. Table 8 shows the concordance lines of **new + Armenia** and **new+ Armenian**:

1.	district of Cilicia must also be included in the new Armenia , as a sine qua non of a permanent settlement
2.	Avenue du President Wilson, Paris, June 18. THE NEW ARMENIA . CASE FOR AMERICAN MANDATE.
3.	nmindful of some of the difficulties which the new Armenian State will have to meet in its initial
4.	remains as to who is responsible for this new betrayal of the Armenians . It is natural enough

Tab. 8: Concordance list of the collocation **new + Armenia** and **new + Armenian**

Concordance lines 1, 2 and 3 all refer to the establishment of the new state for Armenia, after the Turks persecutions and massacres, published respectively on 15th January 1920 and titled “VICTIMS OF THE TURKS. ARMENIAN CLAIMS” (line 1) and on 25th June 1919 and titled “THE NEW ARMENIA. CASE FOR AMERICAN MANDATE” (line 2, the title of the letter, and line 3). The analysis of the co-text of line 1 and 3 show a positive semantic prosody of *new* when collocating with Armenia, as shown respectively in examples (10) and (11) below:

- (10) 4. The fertile district of Cilicia must also be included in the **new Armenia**, as a sine qua non of a permanent settlement. A certain amount of assistance will be required in

reorganizing the political, social, and economic conditions, which have been dislocated by recent events, but, given the guarantee of security, strategic frontiers, and fair chances, for economic development, we believe that Armenia will prove the sure bulwark of stable and peaceful conditions in Western Asia.

- (11) We are not unmindful of some of the difficulties which the **new Armenian** State will have to meet in its initial stages of reorganization, but we think that the force required for maintaining order in the country would be much smaller than it is generally believed.

They both deal with the creation of an Armenian state, and both express a positive view on the possibility for Armenia to be created, despite the initial difficulties, which are referred to in both letters with the word *reorganization*. However, these difficulties emerge in concordance line 4, where *new* collocates with a negative evaluative noun (*betrayal*) and is included in a letter published on 3rd March 1920 titled “ARMENIAN MASSACRES. THE TURKS IN CILICIA.” The publication date is significant, because more co-textual evidence shows that the optimistic views on the Armenian state had to face a harder reality. Example (12) below provides co-textual evidence:

- (12) Early in January, 1920, many **Armenian** villagers and muleteers were killed on the roads between Marash and Osmanieh. " Nationalist " forces were organized. In certain positions fortifications were prepared and ammunition and machine-guns were collected. The telegraph wire between Marash and Adana was cut. Before January - 10 French troops were engaged, while Algerian and Senegalese reinforcements were sent forward from Adana. Between January 20 and 30 Zeitun, Firnouz, Fundijak, and other **Armenian** villages were destroyed by the Turks, and 1,500 **Armenians**, mostly women and children, were massacred. On February 1 two American citizens, both of the International Y.M.C.A., Messrs. Perry and Johnson, were murdered near Aintab. Hundreds of Armenians were killed daily. On February 10 Marash fell. After this general massacres began, accompanied by the most horrible outrages, of which I have evidence. Sixteen thousand are said to have perished.

The letter is referring to a situation of continuous massacres and killings of the Armenian people despite the presence of the allied forces and the attempt to create an independent Armenian state. This letter conveys a different connotational meaning to the *new state* evoked in the previous ones for Armenia, which seems here a political construct still far away from becoming a real and serene place for Armenians. As evidence from the LEAQ corpus provides, *new* usually collocates with geo-political entities, and that a negative evaluative meaning is usually detectable when considering larger co-textual occurrences. However, the examples show that,

when *new* directly collocates with Armenia or Armenians, a positive semantic prosody is expressed. It could be concluded that the concept of novelty expressed with *new* has either a negative or a positive semantic prosody according to the geo-political entity with which it co-occurs; further investigation would be needed to collect more examples on similar corpora of letters to the editor mentioning the Armenian question in the same interval of time (1914-1926).

5.3 Last

The last adjective associated with the news value of timeliness under examination is *last*. Frequent lexical collocates suggested by WordSmith Tools (Scott 2020) are *years*, *year*, *century*, *war*. *Last* collocates with other time-related nouns (*August*; *autumn*; *days*; *months*; *fortnight*; *hours*; *Monday*; *Saturday*; *summer*; *Thursday*; *week*), and with nouns related to the massacre of Armenians (*agony*; *massacre*; *invasion*). The news value of timeliness seems to be the main reason for the most frequent choices of the word *last*, but it is worth investigating further into the semantic prosody of the most frequent collocate (*years*) and of the most frequent noun related to the genocide (*massacre*; *massacres*). Table 9 shows concordance lines for *years*:

1.	governments during the <u>most important events</u> of the last 10 years , and I have <u>acquired the conviction</u>
2.	leaders of Mahomedan <u>opinion</u> in India during the last 30 years , and I <u>still</u> have the honour of being
3.	writing; and probably no Englishman during the last 40 years <u>has known</u> Constantinople and the Turks
4.	that I am not <u>ignorant</u> of her history during the last 450 years . I was there a few months after the m
5.	an atrocious <u>record</u> of misgovernment during the last 450 years which stands to the Turk's discredit,
6.	European diplomacy has been playing, for the last 50 years . On Saturday you reported <u>massacres</u> of
7.	I Europe has been <u>stirred</u> by the tragedy of the last eight years , is feeling the force of a new spir
8.	er for <u>mischief</u> of the very men who, during the last eight years , have <u>eclipsed</u> even the worst recor
9.	conduct of the Turks in Asia Minor during the last eight years , or the <u>horrible cruelty</u> with which
10.	qualities the Turk possesses, the <u>tragedy</u> of the last few years has proved what his record through ma
11.	has kept alive through the <u>sufferings</u> of the last five years . Cannot an appeal be made to his Maj
12.	he Armenian people alone. The <u>experience</u> of the last forty-five years has <u>demonstrated</u> that the inte
13.	resumed. I have resided in Turkey during the last four years and in a position to <u>state</u> that sinc
14.	aces which have <u>suffered</u> so terribly during the last seven years , and the delivering over to their e
15.	her equally explicit assurances, while, for the last three years , the Greek Army has been <u>fighting</u> f

16.	of <u>massacre</u> ruthlessly carried on during the last three years , have appealed for British protection
17.	of the Soviet Government, against which for the last two years the whole world had been <u>fighting</u> in
18.	Sèvres, and that all that has happened in the last two years has not been avoided. But the Prime
19.	must be made for those who perished during the last two years of the war. In a letter to the late L
20.	possible way as I have done in the Senate in the last two years I voted for the Lodge resolution

Tab. 9: Concordance list of the collocates of **last**

The numeric quantifier invariably featured in each collocation indicates a clear referential function of *last* in the timeline of the events mentioned in the letter. Co-textual collocates show a preference for a semantic prosody of knowledge (*acquired the conviction; opinion; has known; ignorant; cord; demonstrated; state*) and one of emotive evaluation related to the massacres (*stirred; mischief; tragedy; sufferings; experience; suffered; massacre; massacres*). Evidence shows that when evaluative nouns related to massacres are put in relation to the semantic unit of timeliness expressed through **last + years**, those nouns are most often left collocates to the prepositional phrase **of + the + last + (num ADJ) + years**. This conveys a specific connotational meaning to the phrase, stressing the duration of negatively connoted events while highlighting the temporal proximity to the readers, in what seems an attempt to engage them further in the topic reported, and made them condemn it. Examples (13), (14) and (15), taken from the letters published on 4th April 1924 (“ARMENIANS AND TURKS”), on 1st March 1921 (“THE FATE OF ARMENIANS”), and on 12th September 1922 (“WAR IN ANATOLIA. ALLIED PLEDGES TO GREEKS”) provide further co-textual reference to support this claim:

- (13) Every feeling of duty and humanity appeals to us not to forsake the unfortunate refugees who have escaped to Erivan from Turkish cruelty in vast numbers – refugees whom the charity of Englishmen and Americans has kept alive through **the sufferings of the last five years**.
- (14) But whatever other qualities the Turk possesses, the **tragedy of the last few years** has proved what his record through many centuries before it made abundantly clear – namely, that he is utterly lacking in the qualities that are needed for efficient, or even decent and tolerable, government; and, above all that the Christian races cannot be left subject to his intolerable yoke without an utter disregard of every principle of justice and humanity.
- (15) It was to be hoped that, as a redeeming grace towards a deceived people, the Allied Powers would have left the Armenian people alone. 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.

Underlined in examples (13), (14), and (15) is evidence of co-textual evaluative phraseology that express a strong condemnation of the Armenian events, and what is portrayed as inaction or wrong action on the part of the Allied Powers. Therefore, also in this case timeliness is connected to a semantic prosody of condemnation of the events reported using negative emotional phraseology. The same condemning judgment can be observed when examining the evaluative language of *massacre* as collocate of *last*, in both its singular and plural forms. As the word *genocide* had not been invented at that time, *massacre* and its related forms were among the most frequent words to refer to the atrocities (another word frequently used) perpetrated on the Christian minorities under the Ottoman rule. Table 10 shows the occurrences of *massacre* and *massacres* in the concordance lines of *last*:

1.	European diplomacy has been playing, for the last 50 years. On Saturday you reported massacres
2.	or by the American Near East Relief before the last massacre are themselves living question-marks a
3.	Christians they could lay their hands upon, the last reported massacre being that of Hadjin, some we
4.	raise funds for the <u>orphan Armenian victims</u> of the last Turkish massacre . Their motive was not love
5.	campaign of massacre and <u>terror</u> continues, as the last surviving Christian communities are <u>wiped out</u>
6.	horrors of massacre ruthlessly carried on during the last three years, have appealed for British protection

Tab. 10: Concordance list of **last + massacre(s)**

Lines 1, 2, 3 and 4 report examples of *massacre* as right-collocate of *last*, while lines 5 and 6 show left occurrences of *massacre*. The noun has an emotive evaluative connotation, which is reinforced by further evaluative language occurring co-textually. Examples (16) and (17), taken from the letters published on 28th February 1921 (“THE ARREST IN SAMSUN”) and on 17th October 1922 (“DR. RECHAD AND THE GREEKS”) expand on lines 4 and 5, underlining further evaluative language in use:

- (16) The most nauseating sight I saw in Samsun was a party of rich Turks ostentatiously patronizing a bazaar held to raise funds for the orphan Armenian victims of **the last Turkish massacre**. Their motive was not love for the Armenian, but the desire to create a favourable impression in the minds of British and American officers. As soon as our

backs are turned the Turk has resumed his barbarous treatment of the subject nationalities.

- (17) Although the majority of Greek and Armenian Civilian men in Asia Minor have been deported into Angora, into what is tantamount to slavery, and the majority of women and children exiled, the Turks' campaign of **massacre** and terror continues, as **the last** surviving Christian communities are wiped out one by one.

Here as well as in the data for *recent* and *new*, evaluative lexical items with a negative emotional connotation such as *nauseating*, *ostentatiously*, *barbarous*, *slavery*, *terror*, *deported*, *exiled*, *wiped out* assign a semantic prosody of condemnation to the co-textual phraseology to which the collocations of *last* are semantically related. This seems to prove the existence of a semantic prosody of negative judgment associated with the news value of timeliness, expressed with collocating emotive evaluative language, and relying on the news values of negativity and superlativeness as well.

6. Final remarks

Newspapers select and edit letters in view of the bidirectional relation with their readership, publishing materials which are of interest to their readers and which at the same time reflect their views and attitudes (Chovanec 2012; Gabrielatos and Barker 2008). Therefore, the construction of the Armenian question in the letters to the editor of *The Times* reflects both the interests of the readers, of their views and opinions, and of the editorial agenda of *The Times* between 1914 and 1926. The concept of novelty and of temporal relevance implied by timeliness concur to the construction of the newsworthiness of the letters to the editor, and to their relevance for the readers of *The Times*.

The paper performed a corpus-driven analysis of the co-textual phraseology of the news value of timeliness, expressed through the time-related adjectives *recent*, *new*, and *last*, looking for evidence of a semantic prosody related to timeliness. The adjectives were analysed in their most recurrent collocations, and their concordances were examined from a quantitative and qualitative point of view, considering their attributive use. Occurrences of evaluative language were isolated and analysed both when collocates of the adjectives and in a more extended co-textual phraseology of the unit of meaning represented by the nodes, or by recurrent collocations. Findings show that a consistent semantic prosody of condemnation related to the attributive use of the adjectives *recent*, *new*, and *last* is expressed through collocating evaluative language, or through evaluative language connected through anaphoric or cataphoric reference. The only exception in LEAQ is shown when *new* directly collocates with Armenia and Armenian,

conveying a more optimistic stance on the events, and a more positive semantic prosody. However, further research on the semantic prosody of the different geo-political entities more frequently mentioned in LEAQ would be needed to further demonstrate this claim. For the limited scope of this research, it could therefore be concluded that timeliness in LEAQ more frequently relates to phraseology that conveys negative judgment on the events reported, criticising and condemning how the Western powers were handling the humanitarian and political situation related to the Armenian question, making the attitude and the editorial policy and views of *The Times* clear.

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