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"JUST A FEW LINES TO LET YOU KNOW" Formulaic language and personalization strategies in Great War trench letters written by semi-literate Scottish soldiers

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Abstract – Historical correspondence has been the object of increasing interest in the field of English linguistics; such research interests, in the case of vernacular letters, offer a valuable insight into language use seen from below. The current article examines a corpus of Great War trench letters written by George Murray and Thomas Clark Russell, two semi-literate Scottish soldiers. The study aims to identify and analyse the formulaic language and personalization strategies used by the soldier letter writers. The letters were transcribed to create a corpus of 94,477 running words. The corpus was examined by using a discourse historical approach (DHA) to critical discourse analysis (CDA). This approach allows an in-depth analysis of the texts, viewed as embedded in the context in which they occur. The letters were divided into segments (i. e. the opening formulae, the text body and the closing formulae) from which frequency word lists and concordances were extracted by using Sketch Engine. Findings show that opening salutations are followed by formulaic expressions, effectively creating a bridge between the salutation and the letter's main content, and that the use of opening salutations and formulaic expressions varied depending upon the intended recipient of the letter as well as on the nature of the encoder's relationship with the addressee. The pronouns identified were examined in context, focusing on their use with modal verbs. The analysis also revealed that modal verbs expressing epistemic modality were the most frequently occurring with pronouns in the corpus.

Keywords: formulaic expressions; personalisation strategies; trench letters; historical discourse analysis; historical pragmatics.

Letters are among the most significant
memorial
a person can leave behind them
(J. von Goethe, "Letters and Essays"
1805)

1. Introduction

This article examines a sub-corpus of trench letters that were written during the Great War by two semi-literate Scottish soldiers. The letters were sent from the trenches of the Western Front from September 1914 to November 1916[1] by two soldiers serving in kilted Highland regiments of the British Army. Both soldiers had completed compulsory schooling until the age of 12, as provided for by the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act (Knox 2000). The provision of universal education in Scotland, and consequent improvement in literacy along with letter writing being taught both at school and through letter writing manuals[2] (Hall, Gillen 2007) facilitated the creation of epistolary discourse by soldiers at the Front who were not fully literate.[3]

The importance of letters during the Great War has been highlighted by several scholars. For example, Proctor (2014) describes how letters from home were extremely important for the combatants and that they effectively created both a direct sense of connectedness with home whilst also seeking, through the semblance of normality, to create distance from the horrors of the trenches. The mass mobilisation of men into the armed forces during World War I created "a sudden and irrepressible 'bulimia' of letter-writing" (Lyons 2013, p. 77), which enabled soldiers to maintain familial bonds with those whom they had left behind, allowing the soldiers to distance themselves from the conflict and ground themselves, instead, in their civilian role, albeit temporarily. Despite the important role played by trench letters in maintaining interpersonal bonds during the conflict, such letters are not easily found in institutional archives.[4]

The aim of the present study is to identify and analyse the repertoire of formulaic expressions and personalization strategies instantiated in the corpus. Both historical letters and the formulaic expressions they contain have been

[1] The letters in the corpus actually cover a longer period; specifically, those written by Murray cover the period from December 1914 to March 1917, while those written by Russell cover a period of 7 months from 4th August 1915 to 30th January 1916. The present study investigates a subcorpus which consists exclusively of letters written by the soldiers while on active service in the trenches of the Western Front. Consequently, the subcorpus covers the period from September 1914 to November 1916.

[2] Research conducted at the National Library of Scotland, regimental museum archives and the Imperial War Museum archives did not lead to the discovery of any wartime letter writing manuals issued to soldiers. Roper (2009) states that very few letter-writing manuals were published in wartime Britain; consequently, it is likely that letter-writing skills had been acquired during schooling and guidance, when required, was likely to have been obtained from magazines, newspaper articles and from other people (p. 57).

[3] Fairman proposes four levels of "letteracies": mechanically-letterate, partly-letterate, letterate and fully-letterate (p. 193). See Fairman (2007).

[4] During the author's research on trench letters, of the 6 regimental archives contacted, only one had letters written by a Scottish working-class soldier in their archives.

investigated extensively (e.g., Nevalainen, Raumolin-Brunberg 2007; Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1999; Fairman 2000; Nevala 2007).

Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995) report on the sociolinguistic investigation of address form conventions in Early Modern English letters. Nevala (2007) examined forms of address in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century letters in the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (CEEC) considering their socio-pragmatic aspects. The study highlights how the formulae within the letters are predominantly governed by the relative power present in the relationship between the writer and his/her correspondent.

Other studies have examined salutations as they form the boundaries in spoken conversations and do likewise in epistolary discourse. Austin (2004) examined the survival of opening formulae from a diachronic perspective, examining eighteenth- and nineteenth-century letters. Austin (2004) suggests that opening salutations are followed by formulaic expressions, the latter effectively constituting a bridge between the opening salutation and the main content of the letter.

Sairio and Nevala's (2013) analysis of the influence of letter-writing manuals in private letters written in eighteenth-century England shows that a letter always starts with the recognition of the intended recipient and that it reflects the relationship of the writer with the addressee. Not only do such salutations express the existing relationship between those involved in the epistolary exchange, they are also formulaic (Jucker 2017).

Despite the wealth of studies dedicated to the examination of historical letters, it would appear that, to date, no linguistic study has yet been conducted on Great War trench letters.

The letters sourced by the author were scanned and transcribed, leading to the creation of a corpus of 94,477 running words. The corpus was examined by using a discourse historical approach (DHA) to critical discourse analysis (CDA) viewed through the lens of historical pragmatics. Since its formulation in the 1980s, DHA has come to be considered as one of the 'most prominent' critical approaches to the study of discourse (Reisigl 2017). This is a flexible, interdisciplinary and problem-oriented approach, which makes it possible to analyse texts by considering them not in isolation, but rather as embedded in the context in which they occurred.

The letters were divided into three segments for the analysis, namely: opening, body and closing segments. Each segment was identified based on the following criteria: a) position on the page, b) content and c) rhetorical move. The three aforementioned criteria permitted identification of the opening salutations and formulae, the main content, and the closing salutations and formulae. Each of the segments was subsequently analysed with Sketch

Engine,[5] leading to the creation of frequency word lists and concordances. Three research questions were formed to guide the research, namely:

1. Which opening salutations and formulaic language are employed by the letter writers?
2. Does the choice of opening salutation and formulaic language used vary depending upon the intended recipient of the letters?
3. What pronouns and modal verbs are used by the encoders as personalization strategies?

The article is structured as follows: Section 2.1 considers epistolary discourse and its unique properties, while Section 2.2 describes trench letters as text sources 'from below'; Section 2.3 reports on the determining socio-historic factors and the role they played in the epistolary exchange. Section 3 describes the materials used and methods adopted for the analysis, while Section 4 consists of the results and discussion. Finally, Section 5 presents the conclusion of the study and suggests future research avenues.

2. Letter writing

Prior to the advent of modern means of communication, letters had long been an efficient, rapid and cost-effective means to communicate with physically distant family members and friends. By the late nineteenth century, in countries where literacy was well-established, letter writing constituted an accessible means of communication with people from whom the writer was physically separated. Letter writing was, and continues to be, one of the "most widespread form[s] of sustained writing" (Barton, Hall 1999, p. 2).

Historical letters grant the modern-day researcher insights into how language was used in the past; not only in writing but also, in part, in speech as well. The reason is that letters are "as close to speech as non-fictional texts can be" (Elspaß 2012, p. 156), and private letters in particular contain features and patterns that mirror the informal dimension of orality of spoken language" (see Biber 1988). The properties shared between spoken language and familiar letters may be attributed to the interactive nature of the text, to the fact that the letter is addressed to a specific individual in a temporal and physical environment that is familiar to the writer and which, in turn, permits the writer to refer directly to both personal feelings and situations (Biber, Finegan 1989, p. 497). As a discourse type, lower-order letters may represent the vernacular or ordinary language of the writers, thus, for historical linguists they constitute "a possible alternative to the spoken language studied by modern

[5] Sketch Engine is a corpus manager and text analysis software developed by Lexical Computing Ltd. in 2003. It allows the user to create and store large corpora online and offers a variety of different tools for corpus analysis.

sociolinguists" (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2009, p. 122). Letters can be considered as constituting turns in a succession of interactions between people (Palander-Collin 2010, p. 661); furthermore, letters consist of exchanges which are akin to conversational exchanges as each letter (text) "responds to a previous text, whether spoken or written, and at the same time anticipates new texts" (Fitzmaurice 2002, p. 1). Yet, while letters and conversations share common features, Fitzmaurice states that letters ought not to be considered simply as a "conversation on paper" (2002, p. 233).

2.1. Epistolary discourse

In recent decades, epistolary discourse has been the object of increasing research interest as attested by the compilation of several relevant corpora.[6] Dossena and Del Lungo Camiciotti (2012, p. 4) found that epistolary discourse can be identified as distinct from other discourse types due to "certain pronominal and predicative traits that, taken together, constitute what is unique to its language. The particular nature of epistolary discourse is one that sets it apart from other types of discourse as it provides testimony of human experiences. In fact, Lanson (1895) considered letters as being 'incontestable and sole human documents'. The increase in interest in the study of epistolary discourse has been documented with the publication of numerous works relating to letters written during different periods in different countries.[7]

The letter writer, when engaged in the act of encoding a letter, essentially creates an intended recipient for his/her letter; therefore, epistolary is marked by *I* and *You* and by the relation between them. The writer's presence in the letter is achieved through the use of *I* and through the closing signature (Barton, Hall 2000, p. 6). While the encoder is present through *I*, the recipient is referred to by the encoder with *You*. *I* and *You* represent the interpersonal bonds between the correspondent and his reader whilst they are structuring meaning in the letters. In this kind of discourse, the *I* is defined in relation to the *you* to whom the letter has been addressed (Dossena 2012) while the *You* is, in turn, constructed as an intended reader by the writer (Barton, Hall 2000, p. 6) and refers to a specific person within the writer's world. Not only is the definition of *I* bound to the *you* of the letter, but this relation is further characterized by the fundamental requirement of participation of the '*you'* who received the

[6] Such as, for example, The Cherry Valley Chronicles Corpus (see Dennett 1990); The Corpora of Early English Correspondence (CEEC400) (see Nevala and Nurmi 2013); 19CSC: A Corpus of Nineteenth-Century Scottish Correspondence compiled by Dossena and Dury (see Dossena 2004); the Corpus of Oz Early English (COOEE) (see Fritz 2012).

[7] See for example, in Canada, Dollinger (2008); in Belgium, Vandenbussche (2006); Puttaert (2016); in Finland, Meurman-Solin (2000); Klippi (2013); Nordlund (2007); Raumolin-Brunberg and Nevalainen (2007); in Germany, Elspaß (2007a, 2007b, 2012); in Austria, Mazzon (2012); in Italy, Dossena (2007, 2012); in the Netherlands, Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2012, 2010); van der Waal and Rutten (2013); in Norway, M^{c}Cafferty (2017).

letter. Without the *you*-recipient's participation in the practice, there can be no meaningful epistolary exchange. It is precisely the reader's response that produces one of the most distinctive features of epistolary discourse, namely the degree to which it is influenced not by one, but rather by two persons and the type of relationship that exists between them (Altman 1982). Indeed, if the '*you'* of epistolary discourse did not participate in the exchange, then the discourse would not differ significantly from a diary entry. Epistolary discourse is also distinguished from other discourse forms due to the temporal relativity which enables the letter writer to invoke two worlds in his texts, namely "the here and now of the writer and the here and now of the reader" (Barton, Hall 2000, p. 6). The 'here and now' constitute a temporal pivot for the encoder. The letter is written in the present, but it is a present from which the writer considers the past. The writer also contemplates possible future events. Altman (1982) states that the relationship of the past and the future to the present is of importance in the unfolding of epistolary discourse, as the writer is anchored in the present at the moment of writing.

2.2. Trench letters as text sources 'from below'

Until the late twentieth century, language historians favoured investigation of language history 'from above' (Elspaß 2007). In adopting a '*from above*' approach, the language varieties used by the lower social classes were ignored as they were labelled as 'non-standard' varieties. Instead, language history seen *'from below'* is interested in both the oral and the written language used by the lower and lower middle classes whose texts previously had not made a contribution to language history. In fact, Cowan (2012, p. 164) states that private letters have long been "the preserve it seems of philatelists who all too often have dismembered their materials". With the development of literacy amongst the general population, the lower social classes were able to both produce and consume letters, giving rise to the creation of a range of written texts.[8]

Vernacular writings produced by the "lower classes" have been the focus of interest of numerous scholars resulting in various publications devoted to their analysis, such as those by Auer et al (2015), Hernandez-Campoy and Conde-Silvestre (2012) and Jucker and Taavitsainen (2010). However, in recent years, there has been a growing realization that such letters afford a unique opportunity for the study of language use and literacy in history as they can provide an insight into the language of the lower classes, a social group which has all too often been silenced.

Fairman has conducted extensive research on lower-order letters examining different letter genres. Fairman stressed how writing is essentially

[8] See Elspaß (2007b) for more detail.

a learning process that cannot be acquired randomly (2007, p. 40). Consequently, lower-class letter writers are likely to have acquired letter writing skills either in school or by means of self-learning through the use of letter-writing manuals.[9]

Ashplant (2018) has proposed the categorisation of lower social class letters into three distinct categories, all of which have been the focus of significant research in recent years. Ashplant's first category is that of pauper letters written to petition for financial assistance; his second category consists of emigrant letters, while the third category is that of soldiers' letters, a category that has been the object of increasing research interest since the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War. Unlike previous research on World War I letters that had a purely historical stance, recent research has seen the involvement of scholars from a range of different disciplines including, but not limited to, Film Studies, Cultural Studies, Literary Studies, Memory Studies and Tourism Studies.[10] The Digital Humanities have also made an important contribution to First World War research through the creation of various online resources relating to the conflict, considering the war from a range of disciplinary perspectives.[11]

Numerous scholars have studied Great War letters from a historical perspective; such studies have focused on the writing produced by soldiers serving with a number of the belligerent armies; however, such studies have tended to focus on discovering information contained in the letters to further aid understanding of the role of letters in the soldiers' lives.[12] The study conducted by Lyons (2003)[13] examined letters written by French soldiers during the Great War to reveal the history of the nature of *poilus* letter-writing. It would appear that scholars in the field of linguistics have gradually developed an increasing research interest in the Great War and its letters, especially in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis, as documented by the

[9] See Shvanyukova (2019); Sairio and Nevala (2013).

[10] For Cultural Studies, see Carden-Coyne (2015); for Film Studies, see Smith and Hammond (2015); for Literary Studies, see Hutchinson (2015); for Memory Studies see Saunders and Cornish (2009); for Tourism Studies see Jansen-Verbeke and George (2015).

[11] The 1914-1918 International Encyclopaedia of the First World War is an English-language online reference work on World War One; it is a multi-perspective, public-access resource created by a worldwide network of Great War researchers: http://www.1914-1918-online.net. Another collaborative Digital Humanities project has resulted in the creation of a virtual research infrastructure granting access to historical resources across institutional and national boundaries: http://www.cendari.eu.

[12] Such as Barkhof (2017) on the writings of German POWs in Japan during WWI; Hallett (2007, 2010) on the writings of First World War nurses and volunteers; Hanna (2003, 2008, 2014), Housiel (2013, 2014); Omissi (1999) on the WWI letters of Indian soldiers; Royle (2014) on the writings of Scottish soldiers in WWI; Stiaccini (2015) on the writings of Italian WWI soldiers; Wilkinson (2017) on the writings of British POWs in Germany; Crouthamel (2014) on the writings of German soldiers of WWI.

[13] For the past two decades, Lyons has published numerous studies on the history of reading and writing, with a distinctly 'from below' focus. See Lyons (2003, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2013).

research conducted by Housiel (2008, 2013, 2014) and by Vicari (2012, 2014, 2017, 2018); however, to date, such research has predominantly concentrated on letters written by *poilus* while letters written by soldiers serving in the British Army have been overlooked. The lack of research on lower order trench letters may be attributable to the scarcity with which such letters are to be found in institutional archives.

2.3. Determining socio-historical factors in the epistolary exchange

Letter writing constituted an accessible means of communication where key factors were present. In addition to widespread literacy, the exchange of private letters required an efficient, reliable postal system.

2.3.1. Literacy

Letter writing was an accessible form of communication in countries where the population had well-developed levels of literacy. Scotland fared favourably in terms of literacy amongst the general population in comparison with other nations:

> Literacy rates amongst men and women, above average in comparison to European and English counterparts, underwent steady improvement to near universal literacy by 1900. (Finkelstein 2007, p. 432)

The almost near universal literacy rates found in Scotland by 1900 can be attributed to the Scottish education system which originated from the parish schools that were founded in the late 1500s (Holmes 2015).

The Scottish Education system was, in essence, a democratic system that allowed all children irrespective of gender or social class access to instruction without charging fees. A consequence of the principle of universal instruction was an increased level of literacy. It has been stated that literacy tended to be higher in Protestant countries (David 2012) since the Church was active in the teaching of literacy. While it is clear that literacy had an important role in the creation of letters from and to Great War soldiers, the exchange of letters had to be efficiently managed.

2.3.2. Affordable postal systems

Letter writing became a democratic means of communication due to the advent of cheap national and international postal services which made sending mail more affordable, even for the working class (see Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2009). Altman (1982) highlights the importance played by the reachability of the addressee in facilitating the exchange of epistolary discourse. If the

addressee cannot be easily reached by the postal service, the epistolary exchange is rendered futile.

Gillen (2013), in her study on the picture postcard in Edwardian Britain, states that the reality of six or more mail deliveries per day in towns and cities led to an experience which was "closer to the synchronicity of the digital communications than vernacular written communications" (p. 488). Such synchronicity in the exchange of written communications would prove to be a challenge to provide to soldiers serving in the trenches given the frequent and often unpredictable movement of troops from one section of the line to another.

The Army Postal Service (APS) was responsible for the efficient management of communications sent to the front, as well as those sent home from soldiers on active service. The APS developed a degree of efficiency that allowed for parcels and letters sent from the UK to reach the front within a week. Letters from home were often treasured possessions, read and reread over time and also handed down from generation to generation, thus allowing for the encoders' thoughts and feelings to be shared through time (Davies 1983, p. 313).

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Corpus description

The materials used in the present study consist of a specially created corpus which was compiled during the author's doctoral research. The corpus consists of a collection of 250 letters with a total of 94,477 running words written by George Murray and Thomas Clark Russell during their time of Active Service on the Western Front. The letters cover approximately 27 months of the conflict. All the texts included in the corpus were handwritten by both soldiers,[14] the corpus includes letters and postcards, all of which are addressed to members of their immediate families. Table 1 reports the number of running words for the corpus, including the individual running word total for each of the soldiers, while the final row reports the total number of running words in the combined corpus.

Murray word count	67,309
Russell word count	27,168
Total word count	94,477

Table 1
Trench letter corpus - number of running words.

[14] Field postcards, which consist of preformulated texts in which the writer selects the option that best meets the information he wishes to communicate were removed as they do not contain samples of original text written by the soldiers. This decision to remove field postcards did not significantly impact the corpus, as there were just three field postcards altogether in the two collections of letters.

The letters in the corpus do not contain references exclusively to the conflict and life at the front; they also contain instances in which there was a transmission of information from the home front to the trenches, most frequently news of significant events at home. Specifically, the letters in the corpus highlight how the information exchanged in trench letters did not refer exclusively to the sharing of personal information; indeed, the letters contain explicit references to events that had occurred in Scotland and which had shocked the nation, such as the Quintinshill rail disaster[15] as well as the sinking of the HMS Natal.[16]

The letters were closely examined, and the contents were segmented, with the creation of distinct segments for the opening formulae, the text body and the closing formulae.[17]

3.2. Encoder biographies

Biographical information relating to the encoders of historical ego-documents allows for an in-depth reconstruction of the writers' lives. For both George Murray and Thomas Clark Russell, official archives[18] were consulted and relevant records were accessed. Where information was not available, tentative hypotheses were made. In the present work, the online National Records of Scotland (NRoS) archive was used to access records pertaining to the Statutory Registers of births, deaths and marriages; Old Parish Registers of births and baptisms, deaths and burials, and banns and marriages were also consulted.

Information on the soldiers' respective villages was sourced from the online edition of the New Statistical Accounts of Scotland 1845[19] (Gordon 1845) which were compiled by parish ministers entrusted with the task of writing a detailed description of their parish. The entries include data relating to geographical composition, types of employment and industries, and the population (including commentary on their education, character and vices).

[15] A railway accident at Quintinshill in which more than 200 men perished (Routledge 2002).

[16] The sinking of the HMS Natal took place in the Cromarty Firth at New Year; between 390 and 421 people lost their lives (Hampshire 1961).

[17] The opener consists of the date, location and salutations; the text body is the letter section that conveys the actual message, while the closing formulae include final salutations and the signature.

[18] The online archive ScotlandsPeople (SP) was the main archive consulted; it is a partnership between the National Records of Scotland and the Court of the Lord Lyon. It currently holds a total of 90 million digitised records related to Scotland and its people which can be accessed through the site. Records of births and baptisms; banns and marriages; deaths and burials are to be found in the Old Parish Registers which contain data up to 1855 when the Statutory Registers of births, deaths and marriages began.

[19] The Statistical Accounts of Scotland document life in Scotland in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. The Old (or First) Statistical Account of Scotland (OSA) was published between 1791 and 1799 and the New (or Second) Statistical Account of Scotland (NSA) was published under the auspices of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland between 1834 and 1845. The first two Statistical Accounts of Scotland are held to be among the best European contemporary records of life during the agricultural and industrial revolutions.

Details regarding both Murray and Russell's military service were sourced from The National Archive; this preserves an extensive collection of World War I records, including military records and private correspondence. Specifically, Medal Index Cards (MICs), Medal Roll Records and, where applicable, the British Army Register of Personal Effects were consulted; all the aforementioned records provide valuable data relating to enlistment, deployment and length of service.

3.2.1. George Murray, Fortrose

George Murray was born in Fortrose on 25 November 1894 (NRS 1894); at the time of his birth, George's father, James, was employed as a Master House Carpenter. According to both the 1891 and 1901 censuses, George Murray attended school between the ages of 6 and 16. The New Statistical Accounts of Scotland (1845, p. 358) record that there were several schools in the parish, none of which were strictly parochial due to the parish school having been merged with the burgh school in Fortrose; unfortunately, school rolls and records for this period no longer exist; however, Murray is likely to have attended the burgh school in Fortrose. In the 1911 census, George was living in Fortrose with his parents and his occupation was given as scholar, aged 16 (NRS 1911). No further census data are currently available,[20] however, it has been possible to reconstruct George Murray's life through information obtained from British Army Records and his letters home from the front.

At the outbreak of the war George Murray was a member of the Territorial Force; unfortunately, his attestation papers are not in the National Archives soldier records. However, in such cases, medal records, including the Medal Index Card (MIC) records can provide useful data.[21] According to George Murray's MIC, he was a member of the 1/4th Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders. He enlisted with the rank of Private and rose to the rank of Sergeant. On the right-hand side of the MIC, a blank space is left for remarks, and there, annotated is the following: "Dis. 11. 8. 14". According to the Silver War Badge records, George Murray results as having enlisted on the 12th August 1914; therefore, it would appear that Murray had been a member of the Territorial Force prior to the war and had undergone the requisite military training. His discharge on the 11. 8. 14 may have been due to his having completed the period of service for which he had initially signed up and by re-enlisting with the 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders, he was able to stay in the same battalion.

[20] Census records are not made public until 100 years after the census was taken.

[21] MIC data provides information on the soldier's battalion, the medals he was entitled to, the theatre of war where he first served and his data of deployment; a blank space is also left for additional remarks.

The 1/4th Seaforths were part of the Highland Division, which was one of the original infantry divisions (MacLeod, Reid 2016, p. 15); the Highland Division was created in 1908 by the establishment of the Territorial Force. From its creation up until the outbreak of war, the 1/4th Seaforths had remained in Scotland following mobilization (French 2016); the battalion was then sent to Bedford in mid-August 1914 (Bewsher 1921, p. 1) where they participated in a period of training. They were inspected by King George V on October 22nd. The 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders joined the 152nd Brigade in the 51st (Highland) Division in November 1914 for service on the Western Front as reinforcements for the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) which had suffered considerable losses and was below fighting strength.

George Murray served with the 1/4th Seaforths[22] for the duration of his time at the front; his sisters had tried to encourage him to apply for a transfer home as his skills as a trainee engineer would have enabled him to make a valuable contribution to the war effort; however, his letters suggest that Murray was not entirely keen on the idea. He continued on Active Service on the Western Front and was in action at Festubert and Givenchy-en-Gohelle (spring 1915) participating in the Second Battle of Ypres in May 1915, the Battle of the Somme at High Wood (Jul-Aug 1916) and the Battle of Ancres, also known as the Battle of Beaumont Hamel (Nov 1916).

Murray's Active Service came to an abrupt end in early December 1916 when he received what was initially considered to be a minor wound but was in fact significantly more serious than initially thought.

3.2.2. Thomas Clark Russell, Dalziel

Thomas Clark Russell was born on 18th August 1885 in the district of Hamilton, in the County of Lanark. He was the sixth child of David Wright Russell, and Margaret Clark. According to the 1891 census, Thomas was a scholar aged 6 and was living with his parents and five of his siblings (NRS 1891, p. 11). Despite the school-leaving age having been raised to 14 in 1883, Thomas's older brother Moses had already found employment down the mine as a pit pony driver. By the 1901 census, Thomas had finished his schooling and was employed as a Coalminer, as was his younger brother David (aged 13) (NRS 1901). From the data available from the census, given that by the age of thirteen his brothers had ended their schooling and were already employed in the coal mining industry, it is also likely that Thomas Clark Russell completed his education at a similar age.

When Great Britain declared war on Germany on 4th August 1914 following the German invasion of Belgium, Russell was married with two young children under the age of 3. As a coal miner, Russell would have been

[22] The correct name of the Battalion is the 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders Battalion; however, the nomenclature used in the present work is the 1/4th Seaforths, as adopted by Murray in his letters.

under no obligation to enlist for two reasons: firstly, the coal industry played a key role in providing essential goods in order to maintain Britain's productive power and, consequently, its workers were required on the Home Front (Martin 1981). Russell is likely to have enlisted having been influenced by several factors; his 'brother' George Allan, a regular with the 1st Gordon Highlanders, had been captured at Le Cateau and was being held as a prisoner in a German camp.[23] The effective wartime propaganda together with patriotic fever (Sanders, Taylor 1982) are also likely to have contributed to Russell's decision to enlist.

Russell's enlistment papers are not among those held at the National Archives; however, the Medal Index Card for Thomas Clark Russell states that he enlisted in the 10th Gordon Highlanders (Service) Battalion with the rank of Private and assigned S/5568 as his service number (WO 372/17). Archival sources for soldiers in the 10th Gordons[24] with service numbers similar to that of Russell suggest that he is most likely to have enlisted between the 7th and the 8th of September 1914 and posted to the 10th Gordons between 8th and 10th September 1914, the battalion being part of the 15th (Scottish) Division.[25] The 15th Division continued training until early summer 1915 when it was considered to be ready for deployment (Stewart, Buchan 2003). The 10th Gordon Highlanders War Diary records that on 3rd July 1915, while at Parkhouse Camp, Salisbury, orders were received that they were to embark for France on 8th July.

The 15th (Scottish) Division served with distinction on the Western Front for the duration of the war, participating in most of the significant actions, including the Battle of Loos and the first Battle of the Somme. They were considered by the enemy as one of the most formidable divisions of the British Army (Stewart, Buchan 2003). Russell was on Active Service at the Front from July 1915, returning home on leave in December 1915 and was at the Front again by Hogmanay.[26] He was killed in action on 11th February 1916 when,

[23] Russell refers specifically to this in his letters stating that he 'wanted to do his bit' to rescue his 'brother'; however, Russell and Allan do not appear to have shared a bond of kinship. Archival sources confirm that Allan was best man at Russell's wedding to Annie Faichen; therefore, it is likely that Russell used the term 'brother' due to his close friendship with Allan.

[24] The correct name of the Battalion is the 10th Gordon Highlanders (Service) Battalion; however, throughout the present work, the nomenclature used is that adopted by the soldiers and by Russell in his letters, the 10th Gordons.

[25] The 15th (Scottish) Division was raised at Aldershot in September 1914 with a nucleus of men who were surplus to the requirements of the 9th (Scottish) Division (Stewart and Buchan, 2003). Since the public response to Kitchener's call to arms had been so great, a Second New Army was authorized in September 1914. Thus, the men who were surplus to requirements of the 9th (Scottish) Division were soon joined by volunteers from Scotland, creating the 15th (Scottish) Division. The 15th, like all British Divisions, was formed by three Brigades (44th-46th), each brigade consisting of four battalions (Simkins 2007).

[26] Hogmanay is the Scots word for the last day of the year and is synonymous with the celebration of the New Year.

according to the War Diaries of the 10th Gordon Highlanders, a mine exploded under a section of the trench occupied by the Battalion (WO/95/1938/2, p. 91). A total of four men were killed by the explosion with only one body being recovered; Russell was one of the three men whose bodies were not recovered.

3.2.3. George Murray letters

The Murray letters cover a total period of 30 months, consisting of 27 months at the front and 3 months in military hospitals in Great Britain. Only the letters written from the front, including Murray's time in both field hospitals and military hospitals in France, were included in the corpus for transcription.

Murray wrote a total of 208 letters from the trenches of the Western Front, all of which were addressed to members of his immediate family. Murray wrote most frequently to his two sisters Kate and Alex. Murray wrote six letters to each of the following family members: his father, his mother and his brother Joe[27] The Murray letter collection has 67,309 running words, including opening and closing formulaic expressions.

The Murray letters were scanned during a visit to the Fort George archives; they were subsequently printed, put into chronological order and transcribed. The transcription is faithful to the original letters and, consequently, presents occasional errors in terms of grammar and punctuation; actual spelling errors, instead, are very few.

3.2.4. Russell letters

A total of 42 letters written by Russell are in the corpus; the 42 letters consist of a total of 27,168 words, covering a period of 7 months from 4th August 1915 to 30th January 1916, written from 'somewhere in France'. Thirty-five letters are addressed to his wife; one to his sister-in-law and six letters to his wife's parents. His letters are written predominantly in English (L1); however, there are instances of use of Scots (L2) lexemes and of French (L3) lexemes.

For transcription, the Russell letters were removed from the envelopes and carefully placed in chronological order before being transcribed. The letters were transcribed without any interference; therefore, errors present in the original letters, incorrect spelling, inaccurate grammar and inconsistent use of punctuation, were transcribed and are present in the corpus, thus allowing the writer's voice to remain as intact as possible.

[27] Joe had emigrated to South Africa prior to the start of the war; in his letters home to his sisters, George often requested that the sisters forwarded letters on to each other and to Joe in South Africa once they had finished reading them.

3.3 Method

The transcribed letters were examined by using the Sketch Engine corpus software. The letters were uploaded to the Sketch Engine website both as individual corpora and as a combined corpus. The two sub-corpora permitted the identification and classification of salutation formulae favoured by each of the soldier letter writers. Opening salutations and formulaic expressions were retrieved with the Sketch Engine concordancer.

The opening salutations and formulaic expressions were analysed using the DHA to CDA viewed from a historical pragmatics perspective. This approach was chosen because it appeared to be an appropriate framework for the study of authentic data (Reisigl 2017): it does not only consider features of discourse and context, but also places equal importance on extralinguistic variables related to culture, society and ideology in historical terms (Fairclough, Wodak 1997; Wodak 1996, 2001), in addition to considering discourse as both a form of knowledge and a social practice (Reisgl, Wodak 2009) in both its oral and written modes (Fairclough, Wodak 1997).

A further reason for the application of the DHA is that when working with historical texts, the importance of the historical element of discourse and its role in the DHA cannot be overlooked as the approach considers the synchronic and diachronic connection of a given discourse with other communicative events occurring either contemporaneously or previously to it (Wodak 1995, p. 12).

In this study the DHA three-dimensional model was applied to the analysis of opening and closing salutations and formulaic expressions: "after (1) having identified the specific *contents* or *topics* of a specific discourse, (2) *discursive strategies* are investigated. Then (3), *linguistic means* (as types) and the specific, context-dependent *linguistic realizations* (as tokens) are examined" (Reisigl, Wodak 2009, p. 93; original emphasis).

The second phase of the analysis consisted in the examination of personalization strategies employed by the soldiers in their letters. Personal pronouns and epistemic modals were chosen as they had been selected for examination in previous investigations of other historical letters (see Dossena 2006; Sairio 2013; Moreton *et al*. 2014). The Sketch Engine analysis of the corpus led to the generation of word frequency lists which, in turn, permitted the identification of the most frequently occurring pronouns and epistemic modal verbs which were then analysed.

Instances of opening salutations and formulaic expressions are reported and discussed in Section 4.1, while Section 4.2 reports and discusses the instances of personalization strategies.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Opening salutations and formulaic expressions

All the letters in the present corpus start with text features that can be considered typical of the letter genre; all the letters start with the date of writing, either in an abbreviated form or extended form, in the upper right corner and invariably include the date, month and year. In some isolated cases, the writer also alludes to his physical whereabouts by including information pertaining to his current location at the time of writing; however, it is done so that it would not risk being intercepted by censors for giving away potentially revealing information, as shown in Example (1) below:

(1)

12th April-15
"Trenchland"

Dear Alex,
Finding some spare time hanging on my hands I think it could be advisable if I would make use of it by writing to you.

Murray records the date in the top right corner of the page; in this particular letter, the date is followed by information about his location; however, he gives his location as *Trenchland* which he encloses in quotation marks. Both the use of the term *Trenchland* together with the quotation marks suggest an instance of humour which he employs in an attempt to mitigate the recipient's worry about the danger he currently faces.

The opening salutation that appears in all the Murray letters consists of the lexeme *dear* followed by the diminutive form of his sisters' names (*Alex* or *Kate*); Murray also addresses his brother with the diminutive form of his given name (*Joe*) whereby the use of the diminutive form could be interpreted as an attempt to reduce distance and to represent intimacy with the addressee.

In Example (1), Murray effectively informs the addressee that he is, at the moment of writing, not occupied and his use of *spare time hanging on my hands* could be considered an example of near orality as it is an informal, colloquial expression that would be more likely to be encountered in speech rather than in a written text. By using such an expression, the writer conveys a sense of safety and almost of distance from peril.

When writing to his parents, Murray favours the more formal kinship term of *Father* and *Mother* rather than use of the equivalent Scots lexemes of *Faither* and *Mither*. The use of such terms signals intimacy whilst also incorporating what can be viewed as respect through the use of the formal term, rather than a more familiar term. The lexemes used by Murray to address his parents represent a bond of kinship, stressing the ties that bind despite the physical distance between them, as shown in Example (2):

(2)

4th July – 15

Dear Father,
I received your very welcome letter two nights ago & was glad to see that things with you were as per usual & I may say, that with me it is the same. There is nothing very startling to announce except that we came out of the trenches last night & we are now back in reserve.

In Example (3), we can see how Murray uses the same type of address when writing to his Mother:

(3)

18th June – 15

Dear Mother
I received Fathers welcome letter the other day & yours last night, & was glad to see that you are all in your usual & getting on nicely without Kate, I had a letter from Mrs McKenzie last night & was pleased to see that they are enjoying their holiday. Fortrose will be a change from big London.

The majority of letters written by Russell are addressed to his wife Annie; however, from the limited number of letters addressed to his parents-in-law (*N*=6), we see that Russell modifies the kinship lexemes used to address his in-laws with the possessive adjective *my* followed by the adjective *dear* in 3 letters; Russell also uses the superlative adjective *dearest* to modify the kinship lexemes *father* and *mother* and in doing so, emphasises the emotive bond existing between them. By formulating his opening salutation in this manner, Russell effectively seeks to reinforce the strength of the relationship between them, whilst also signalling intimacy and affection, as shown in Example (4):

(4)

5 November 1915
Retired out of the trenches
Mud up to kilt tops
Awfull

My Dear Father & Mother,
It now give me great pleasure in writing you these few lines to let you know that at this present minute I am clay up to the neck. We have just retired out of the trenches & with the rain & cold we are an awfull looking lot.

Example (4) includes information relating to Russell's current position, instituted by comparing it to the spatial location of the trenches; he further embellishes the information shared with his wife's parents by offering a description of his physical state. By stating '*mud up to kilt tops'* he seeks to share information of his current state which, in all likelihood, would have been beyond the comprehension of those at home. In order to emphasise the

discomfort in which he is to be found, he adds the adjective *awful* to his pre-script. In Example (5), we can observe how he includes non-essential information after the date before addressing his wife:

(5)

27th January 1916

Kaisers Birthday
very quiet

My dearest Wife,
Just a few lines to let you know I am keeping well hoping this finds you & the children in the best of health.

Russell shares information about it being the Kaiser's birthday and follows with *very quiet,* effectively using what may be classified as superfluous information in order to reassure his wife of the apparent lack of danger at that particular moment in time. Russell starts his letter addressing his wife with the salutation *My dearest wife*, thus communicating and reinforcing the intimate nature of the relationship between the writer and his addressee. Furthermore, Russell effectively emphasises the nature of closeness and intimacy by modifying the noun with a preceding possessive adjective, creating an in-group made up only of the writer and his addressee, and a superlative adjective. Russell's evident preference for the lexeme *wife* preceded by *dearest* (*N*=23) or preceded by the possessive adjective *my (N*=9*)* serves to evoke social proximity and possibly to bridge the physical distance between them (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Whilst little is known about Russell's time on Active Service, the letters inform us that he returned home on leave in December 1915. In Example (6), Russell starts the letter by informing his wife of his safe arrival in France, recorded in the top left corner of the page; the information is presented in a reduced form and serves the purpose of reassuring his wife. The need for reassurance becomes apparent in lines 2 and 3 of the body of the letter as his wife was refused entry to the station to see off her husband:

(6)
Arrived alright

28 day of December 1915

Dear Wife
I am really very sorry at having not got the opportunity in not writing you sooner but never mind. I nearly broke my heart when they turned you at the station entrance and after all the stupid swine at the station put me in the wrong portion of the train which caused me being two day late on arriving here.

The formulaic expressions present in the letters written by Russell, which follow the opening salutations, conform with those described by Davis (1965, cited in Austin 2004). Specifically, the formulaic expressions adopted by Russell communicate:

1. An intimation of the intention to write;
2. A wish for the addressee's health;
3. A statement of the writer's health at the moment of production.

Such expressions are a polite acknowledgment of the addressee's presence and can also refer to a more specific reason for writing. Russell's use of a limited number of formulaic expressions relating invariably to intention to write, a wish for the addressee's health and a statement of his own health at the moment of writing, can be considered, as a limited repertoire that may well be the result of the writer having acquired a more mechanical knowledge of the genre, perhaps due to the limited opportunities of the writer to engage in letter-writing prior to the conflict.

Instead, the formulaic expressions used by Murray do not always follow the abovementioned purposes, and differ from those used by Russell; in fact, the analysis of the Murray letters reveals that Murray favours formulaic expressions that communicate the following:

1. Acknowledgement of receipt of correspondence;
2. Information relating to the writer's current location.

In Murray's letters, it was not possible to clearly identify a third formulaic expression present in the majority of letters in the corpus; the analysis revealed how Murray essentially tailored his use of formulaic expressions in accordance with the type of information he wished to share. In the case of Example (7), Murray adopts a formulaic expression that acknowledges the correspondence he has received:

(7)

24th Aug – 15

Dear Alex,
Your nice parcel arrived safely last night also one from Kate two nights before.
The "smokies" were greatly enjoyed & made a good breakfast this morning

The language used by Murray is rather informal and consists of abbreviated phrases that appear almost telegraphic. Murray first acknowledges the parcel sent by the addressee in a move with the purpose of reassuring his correspondent that the parcel and its contents had arrived safely. Murray also acknowledges the parcel received from his other sister. The formulaic expression in Example (7) also permits Murray to communicate his appreciation of the parcel's contents, which he does by stating that the "*smokies*"[28] were 'greatly enjoyed', although he

[28] Smoked haddock, typical of Arbroath.

does not explicitly state by whom; the use of quotation marks with the lexeme *smokies* implies that the writer has an awareness of it being a lexeme, the meaning of which is clear to his correspondent but not necessarily to the wider population, unless they were from a similar geographical background.

In several letters Murray uses a formulaic expression that refers to home and the people there, as in Example (8) from a letter addressed to his sister Alex who lived in Glasgow. The expression conveys what could be interpreted as a sense of nostalgia for the peace and quiet of Fortrose; the use of the intensifier *even* with the first person singular subject *I* suggests that the writer had previously not been appreciative of the quiet to be found in Fortrose, but that it was something that he acquired an appreciation of after experiencing city life. Such an expression also serves the purpose of creating an in-group with his addressee who, living in Glasgow, is well aware of how the solitude of Fortrose could constitute a welcome change from city life.

(8)

24th July – 15

Dear Alex

I received your very welcome letter last night & was glad to see that you were all well, also that Joe is well & getting along alright. Apparently Fortrose is very quiet this year. Well it never is very busy, so seekers of solitude will find it there and even I used to find it a welcome change from the city.

A further example of Murray's use of a formulaic expression can be found in Example (9), in which the salutation is preceded by two pieces of information relating to his intention to write and a parcel he expects to receive. It is, however, unknown whether these two statements were added at the beginning of the letter or whether they were added at the end and, consequently, constitute a post-script albeit in a non-standard location in the top left corner of the page. The first superscript provides information on the writer's intention to send a field card[29] to his other sister; the second superscript, instead, seeks to reassure the addressee that the arrival of her parcel is to be hoped for the next day.

(9)

Will drop a field card to Alex

Will probably get your parcel tomorrow

Dear Kate

Received your ever welcome letter this morning with Joe's letter enclosed also P. O. for which I thank you very much. Glad to hear you are all well although having terrible weather. We had our share of it too but the weather is settled again now.

Murray acknowledges his reception of mail from the addressee and shows his appreciation for it through his use of the intensified adjective *ever welcome*. The

same utterance is also used to inform of the safe arrival of the Postal Order (P. O.) and Murray also expresses his gratitude. The utterance appears to blend both formal and more informal styles with the writing eliminating first person pronouns in the initial part of the first sentence, but then uses *I* in his expression of gratitude for the P. O. Given the importance of the weather for soldiers in the trenches as their lives could be significantly impacted by adverse conditions, the reference made in Example (9) effectively creates an in-group with both parties having had *terrible weather*; thus, the expression is used to create a sense of intimacy and closeness despite physical distance. All the Murray letters in the corpus start with a formulaic expression thanking the addressee and acknowledging correspondence received; it is the most frequent formulaic expression found and features in approximately 171 letters where it is present immediately after the opening salutation. The formulaic expressions used by Murray when addressing his parents could be considered slightly more formal in terms of register, as shown in Example (10) below:

(10)

22nd May – 15

Dear Father
Your letter to hand today with all the news & it was a change from Kate's usual one, which is usually a bit cheerless but I suppose poor Kate can't get her mind off that strain & it is little wonder especially after what has occurred recently.

The use of language in Example (10) conveys the familial bond between the writer and the addressee; however, the initial phrase of the expression is more formal compared to the expressions used in the letters Murray wrote to his sisters, shown in Examples (7) to (9).

There is only one letter in the Russell collection that was addressed to Bella, one of his wife's sisters; consequently, it is the only letter written by Russell that can be used for a comparison of the salutations and formulaic expressions used to address a sibling. As in other letters written by Russell, after the opening salutation in which he addresses his wife's sister with the lexeme that communicates the kinship bond existing between the writer and the addressee, the writer informs the addressee of his state of health and combines it with a wish for the health of the addressee and other members of the family – see Example (11) below:

(11)

17 January 1916

Dear Sister,
Just a few lines to let you know that I am keeping well, hoping this finds you all well at home keeping well. But I must enquire after Father & Bob. How are they getting along. Father how is he keeping, is he feeling any easier.

From the content of the initial sentences, it is possible to infer that Russell is concerned about the health of both his father-in-law and his brother-in-law. Russell uses the deontic modal *must* in justifying his need to ask after them. As in a number of letters in the corpus, the writer adopts a style of writing that is almost telegraphic and very much to the point, reducing his phrases to almost conversational short bursts of writing in which there is a total absence of conjunctions. Murray uses salutation formulae addressing his sisters with the diminutive form for their given name; instead, Russell opts to use a noun representing the relationship between the writer and the addressee. Both address terms convey the writers' belonging to an in-group consisting of the writer and his addressee. A comparison of the salutations used by bother writers reveals a striking difference: Murray never uses a kinship term in his letters to his sisters, whereas Russell only uses kinship terms to address his wife and parents-in-law. Unfortunately, there are no letters written by Russell to other siblings; therefore, his use of salutations when writing to this particular type of addressee cannot be discussed or even hypothesized.

On the other hand, the letters written by Russell demonstrate that he appears to use a different repertoire of formulaic expressions that are located immediately after the opening salutation. The expressions used by Russell seem to follow the categorisations proposed by Davis (1965) more closely than Murray, as shown in Example (12):

(12)

26 day of October 1915
Sun shining but it is bitter cold

Dearest wife
Just a few lines to let you know that I am keeping well hoping this finds you and the children well. Nannie I have been out for five days so we go back again today.

The letter starts in the top left corner with information relating to the climatic conditions at his specific physical location; in doing so, Russell uses language to effectively render his wife a participant, at least in terms of knowledge, of the weather he is currently experiencing in France. All of the letters addressed to his wife start with the reason for writing (*just a few lines to let you know*) and is followed by a statement describing the writer's health at the moment of writing which is, in turn, followed by a wish for the recipient's health and that of their children. This formulaic expression is to be found in all the letters in the corpus addressed to Annie Russell. In letters addressed to Russell's wife's parents, he uses the same expressions but with the difference that he does not explicitly express a wish for the recipients' health; instead, he does so implicitly by using the object pronoun *them* which encompasses all the family members in his wishes for health. He then uses a further formulaic expression to thank '*all his sisters*', of whom there were 7, together with his in-laws for the parcel they sent with

foodstuffs. Russell uses both a deontic modal (line 3) and an epistemic modal (line 4). The deontic modal expresses Russell's need to show gratitude to his sisters (in-law) and his parents-in-law for the parcel that they had sent. Russell switches from deontic modality to epistemic modality to express his evaluation of the possibility of informing his addresses of the state of the parcel's contents, but seeks to reassure his addressees that the foodstuffs did not go to waste, as shown in Example (13):

(13)

23 day of Oct 1915

Dearest Mother & Father
Just a few lines to let you know I am keeping well hoping this finds them all well at home & I must thank all my sisters & you also for your nice parcel which I received but I may tell you the cakes were pretty well broken up before I got them[. . .]

The act of reassuring correspondents of the safe arrival of parcels and their contents often appears as a formulaic expression and can be attributed to the expense, both in terms of contents as well as of the costs, involved in sending parcels internationally.

The salutations and formulaic expressions described in this section, while they differ in terms of topics, do however serve the same purpose for both soldier letter writers who use them to realize a range of communicative objectives.

4.2. Personalisation strategies

Private letters, as with other ego-documents, afford an insight into the self-perception of the writer (Sairio 2013) and may also allow us an additional insight into the personalisation strategies the writers use in their letters.

The first category examined in the analysis of personalisation strategies is constituted by personal pronoun use. The corpus was analysed using Sketch Engine which permitted the retrieval and ranking, in terms of frequency, of the pronouns occurring in the corpus. The results of the analysis of pronoun occurrence are reported in Table 2. The four most frequently occurring pronouns in the corpus are: *I, you, it* and *we*. Nurmi and Palander-Collin (2008) in their investigation on the nature of letters as a text type found that the use of personal pronouns *I* and *you* can be considered features typical of interactive correspondence; therefore, the high number of occurrences of these pronouns is to be expected, as they contribute to the sharing of information regarding the physical and psychological condition of the self (Dossena 2012, p. 50).

Pronoun	Number of Occurrences
I	3,819
you	1,857
it	1,394
we	1,315
your	783
they	651
me	507
he	480
them	406
my	320
our	292
us	222
him	193
her	193
his	159
she	150
their	112
yourself	39
one	31
yours	28
myself	21
themselves	12
its	12
ourselves	8
himself	7

Table 2
Personal pronouns and possessive adjectives and pronouns in the GWTLC
(total number of occurrences in the corpus).

Once the personal pronouns had been categorised in terms of frequency, the corpus was examined for instances of the four most frequent pronouns in context by means of the concordance function in Sketch Engine. The pronouns identified were then examined with a particular focus on their use with modal verbs used to express epistemic modality – see Traugott (1989). Epistemic modality refers to the way speakers communicate their doubts, certainties, and guesses; it is essentially the use of language to express the speaker's evaluation of the possibility that a considered hypothetical situation will take place in the present, in the future or in the past (Nuyts 2001). The corpus was examined for occurrences of the nine central modal verbs in English, namely: can, could, may, might, must, should, will, would and shall (Biber *et al*. 1999, p. 483). The most frequently occurring modal verb in the corpus is *will* (*N*=1,230) followed by *can* (*N*=276); *may* (*N*=196); *should* (*N*=72) and *might* (*N*=36). This section will present examples of the three most frequently occurring modal verbs in the corpus.

The modal auxiliary *will* is used with an epistemic value in Example (14), where the writer uses the personal pronoun *you* to interact directly with his addressee and makes a prediction of which he is certain regarding a parcel

received from his sister that had to be left behind when he went into the trenches.

(14) *You **will remember** that I left a parcel in the blankets*

Instead, in Example (15), the use of *will* as an instance of epistemic modality is more ambivalent. The writer is sure that *The Ross-shire*, a local newspaper in Fortrose, will publish an article on the topic of his regiment's experiences in the trenches, but it is also possible that the prediction is in fact an observation based upon the writer's reading experiences, given that his sisters frequently sent newspaper clippings in their letters:

(15) *The "Rosshire" **will give** you an account of our experiences.*

Can is the next most frequently occurring modal in the corpus. In Example (16), *can* is used to give permission to the addressee to forward the letter on to another addressee – most likely, the writer's parents. The writer justifies the giving of permission by preceding the modal with his explanation. However, the modal could also be interpreted as a request made in face-saving mode as the writer is not explicitly requesting that the letter is sent on, but is, instead, giving his permission to do so.

(16) *So as I am not writing home, you **can forward** this **on***

In Example (17), the writer uses a familiar style, with features more typical of spoken conversation, in which he uses *can tell you* to communicate that he is in a position to be able to inform his wife of his present situation; in this instance the modal refers neither to prediction nor observation, but rather to the possibility that the writer has to inform his wife of a particular situation.

(17) *Nanni I **can tell** you we are kept busy here*

Example (18) documents the writer's use of modal auxiliary *may*; unlike the majority of instances of modal verb use in the corpus which tends to be used with the first and second singular personal pronouns, here the writer is commenting on Kitchener's 'fine army':

(18) *Kitchener **may say** what he likes about his fine army*

The tone in Example (18) is not overtly positive and could even be considered ironic, since Kitchener's army was formed by civilian volunteers who enlisted despite having no prior military experience. As shown in Fitzmaurice's (2000) analysis of the Cavendish letters, *may* can carry both epistemic and deontic meaning, and here the use of *may* constitutes the writer giving permission to Kitchener to express his opinion on his army; evidently, the situation is only

hypothetical, but through the phrase it is possible to sense the writer's feelings of ire and frustration with Kitchener.

Similarly, in Example (19) the writer is not entirely positive about his experience in the British Army:

(19) *Well this **may be** for country & king but you stand more abuse than kindness*

The writer offers his opinion of his service expressed with **may** representing the epistemic meaning of probability; however, the utterance is unexpected in that the usual collocate would be 'king and country' and not 'country and king'; such an utterance provides us with an insight into the soldier's personal attitude to the conflict, although it may be related to a particular temporal location. However, the soldier expresses negative sentiments by stating that it is more common to encounter abuse than kindness in the army; no attempt is made to mitigate the impact of the utterance.

5. Conclusions

This article analysed a corpus of trench letters with the aim of identifying and analysing the opening salutations, formulaic expressions and personalization strategies used by the encoders. A discourse historical approach to critical discourse analysis, viewed through a historical pragmatics lens, was used in the analysis for several reasons.

The results of the analysis show how the writers' limited schooling had nonetheless imparted a sound awareness and active knowledge of the genre of letter writing. Both letter writers employ the same type of opening salutations which invariably serve the purpose of reassuring the audience of the writers' well-being. Russell and Murray adopt similar salutations with only minor variations between the two writers. The variations can be attributed to the audience to whom Russell and Murray addressed their letters; Murray wrote mostly to his immediate family and specifically to his two sisters, Kate and Alex. Instead, Russell wrote mainly to his wife and favoured opening salutations that embodied the intimacy of their relationship, attempting to maintain emotional bonds despite physical distance. The opening salutations adopted by the letter writers consist predominantly of more formal terms which are mitigated by the authors' use of diminutive forms and by the use of kinship terms in lieu of the addressee's given name, in the case of Russell's letters to his wife.

The formulaic expressions appearing in the letters correspond with the categories proposed by Davis (1965, cited in Austin 2004). In the case of the letters written by Russell, the most common formulaic expressions communicate an intimation of his intention to write, a wish for his audience's

health, and a statement of the writer's health at the moment in which the text was produced. Instead, the analysis of the formulaic expressions adopted by Murray reveal that, differing from Russell, he favoured those that communicated his acknowledgement of receipt of correspondence and the sharing of information relating to his location at the moment of text production. Unlike the analysis of the letters written by Russell, the analysis of the letters written by Murray did not lead to the clear identification of a third formulaic expression recurring repeatedly in the corpus. The analysis did, however, highlight how Murray was able to use a more varied range of formulaic expressions that differed in accordance with the nature of the information he wanted to share with his audience. Both soldiers adopted opening salutations consisting of terms that clearly embody closeness and intimacy in their interpersonal relationships with the addressees.

In terms of the personalisation strategies used, both encoders favoured the use of first-person singular pronouns in their writing thus helping to create the sense of a reciprocal exchange of information with their respective addressees. *I*, *you*, *it* and *we* are the most frequently occurring personal pronouns: *I* (*N*=3,819), *you* (*N*=1,857), *it* (*N*=1,394) and *we* (*N*=1,315). Such pronoun use can be considered typical of correspondence as it reiterates the importance of the *I/you* bond and interaction in the epistolary exchange.

The pronouns identified were then examined in context, with a particular focus on their use with modal verbs. The analysis revealed how the most frequently occurring modal verbs preceded by pronouns express epistemic rather than deontic modality.

It is of course to be admitted that the present study is not without limitations. First of all, it only considers the letters written by two soldiers from similar socio-economic and geographical contexts. Secondly, the entire corpus consists of 94,477 running words, which, when compared with other historical letter corpora, may appear to be rather small. The author hopes to expand the corpus by locating, transcribing and incorporating other trench letters written by semi-literate soldiers from different geographical locations in Great Britain, including, but not exclusively limited to, mainland Scotland.

Despite these limitations, the letters analysed in this study grant the contemporary reader an insight into how the war was experienced first-hand and how such experiences were shared with loved ones at home through the medium of epistolary discourse.

Possible future avenues for research include the analysis of trench letter corpus with regard to identity construction and the role played by English and Scots code-switching and also the analysis of the trilingual code-switching between English, French and Scots viewed from a historical sociolinguistic perspective.

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