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Carolina P. Amador-Moreno  
camador@unex.es

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## Female voices in the context of Irish emigration: A linguistic analysis of gender differences in private correspondence

Carolina P. Amador-Moreno  
University of Extremadura/University of Bergen  
camador@unex.es

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### Abstract

The past few decades have witnessed an increasing interest in private correspondence as a source of information for linguistic analysis. Letter collections represent an invaluable source of evidence at a historical and sociological level and, it has been argued, they are also unique sources for the documentation of language development. Recent research has shown how this type of written data can help in analyzing the correlation between social status/gender and language change. Other uses of personal letters have served to document the presence and development of specific syntactic structures. Within the realm of this genre, the value of emigrant letters is enormous, given that they reflect language features that were transported away from the environments in which they initially emerged. This paper takes a bottom-up approach to the analysis of the language of Irish emigrants and concentrates specifically on gender differences in the use of certain linguistic devices. By applying the tools and techniques of corpus linguistics, this study analyses the expression of closeness, spontaneity and solidarity in the use of a few significant features such as pragmatic markers and pronominal forms. The data under investigation is a corpus of letters written between 1844 and 1886 by members of two families who emigrated from Ireland to Argentina. The paper also argues that, given that letter writing is often at the intersection between spoken and written discourse, this type of approach can help us reconstruct the most characteristic properties of spoken discourse in the past.

**Keywords:** Irish English, private correspondence, Irish emigration, discourse analysis, corpus analysis.

### Introduction

The contribution of women to Ireland's national history was recently highlighted by Irish President, Michael D. Higgins, in a speech marking the 100th anniversary of the foundation of *Cumann na mBan* (the Irish Women's Council). In his speech, President Higgins stressed how female voices "have often been silenced in [Ireland's] national narrative". Although his words were meant as a tribute to the spirit of the women of the organisation, founded in 1914 to work in conjunction with the recently formed *Irish Volunteers*, President Higgins's reference to the silencing of female voices in Irish history brings to the fore the question of the construction of otherness in the Irish context, which is the central topic of this special issue.

The present paper aims to contribute to the issue by discussing the voice of the female migrant as reflected in a collection of private letters written by Irish emigrants who settled in Argentina during the nineteenth century. The letters are part of CORIECOR,

the Corpus of Irish English Correspondence (McCafferty and Amador-Moreno, in preparation), which contains approximately 3.5 million words of personal letters dating from the late seventeenth century to the early twentieth<sup>i</sup>. In using this type of material, which often shows a high degree of direct influence of speech on the written word, the paper brings attention to the value of private correspondence as a source for evidence of spontaneous interaction, nonstandard or vernacular usage, as discussed for example in Dossena and Camiciotti (2012).

Although the experience of the Irish female migrant has attracted scholarly attention in the fields of emigration and gender history (see for example Whelan, 2015; Nolan, 1989; Jackson, 1984; Diner, 1983), very few studies have paid attention to the linguistic component of the letters in order to obtain a more detailed insight into the female experience of migration. Moreton (2012) is an exception, specifically examining linguistic patterns in a collection of female emigrant correspondence, the LOUGH corpus, which contains the letters of four sisters who emigrated from Ireland to the US. Building on the work of Elspaß (2002), McLelland (2007), Dossena (2008), Nurmi and Palander-Collin (2008), Moreton (2012) uses quantitative methods frequently employed in corpus linguistics as a complement to more qualitative approaches in gender history. While acknowledging the challenges of statistical analysis, her work is revealing of how linguistic choices can be indexical of the speaker's identity as well as of the context of a situation. Her study also shows how certain phraseological patterns served to strengthen and reinforce familial relationships through letter-writing (Moreton, 2012, p. 644).

Using Moreton's study as a framework, the present paper explores the correspondence of Irish female and male emigrants in the Argentinian context. It examines how patterns of language use reflect identity and sociopragmatic issues that define the speakers partaking in the process of letter-writing. I first provide some background to the topic of Irish emigration to Argentina. Then I lay out the methodology of the present study, and briefly profile the data and the motivation for this paper. Next I discuss initial findings and some of the implications of gender variation as observed in the use of some of the language patterns that arise from the corpus-based approach that is employed in the study.

### **Irish lives in a Latin American context**

It has been estimated that during the nineteenth century in the region of 40-45,000 Irish people emigrated to Argentina (Murray, 2003). Although the statistical information available is incomplete, we know from the existing databases that the largest influx of Irish emigrants issued mostly from the counties of Westmeath, Wexford and Longford, as well as from other areas, as shown in Table 1. They settled mainly in Buenos Aires, and the surrounding provinces. Table 2 indicates the places of residence of those who were specifically identified as Irish immigrants.

**Table 1: Origin of Irish emigrants to Argentina (Murray, 2006, p.7) <sup>ii</sup>**

<b>County</b>	<b>% Immigrants</b>
Westmeath	42.90%
Wexford	15.60%
Longford	15.30%
Cork	4.50%
Clare	3.80%
Offaly	3.10%
Dublin	2.60%
Kerry	1.70%
Others	10.50%

**Table 2. Place of residence in the 1869 Argentinian census (Murray 2006: 10)**

<b>1869</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
City of Buenos Aires	CBA + Belgrano + Flores	750	14.65%
Buenos Aires	Carmen de Areco	433	8.46%
Buenos Aires	Mercedes + Suipacha	393	7.68%
Buenos Aires	Luján	284	5.55%
Buenos Aires	Salto	270	5.28%
Buenos Aires	San Andrés de Giles	234	4.57%
Buenos Aires	Exaltación de la Cruz	231	4.51%
Buenos Aires	Monte	231	4.51%
Buenos Aires	San Pedro	214	4.18%
Buenos Aires	Arrecifes	203	3.97%
Buenos Aires	San Antonio de Areco	178	3.48%
Buenos Aires	Navarro	159	3.11%
Buenos Aires	Lobos	144	2.81%
Buenos Aires	Las Heras	128	2.50%
Buenos Aires	Chacabuco	124	2.42%
Buenos Aires	Chascomús	120	2.34%
Buenos Aires	Veinticinco de Mayo	116	2.27%
Buenos Aires	Chivilcoy	114	2.23%

Buenos Aires	Merlo	106	2.07%
Others		686	13.40%
<b>Total</b>		<b>5,118</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

In terms of the work activity that the emigrants engaged in once they arrived, the census returns of 1869 report occupations such as ‘cattle dealer’, ‘breeder’, ‘poster’, ‘farm hand’, ‘shepherd’ or ‘landowner’ (quoted in Kelly, 2009, p. 76), which is an indication that the Irish settlement in Argentina became mostly rural-based. This variety of rural occupations was the result of the growth of the Argentine wool industry (Barnwell, 2003, p. 6), which allowed the immigrant community to organise themselves through a system whereby the Irish immigrant would herd sheep on a shared basis (Kelly, 2009, p. 77; McKenna, 2000a, p. 93-94) and eventually progress to becoming a landowner (McKenna, 2000a, p. 99).

As mentioned in Amador-Moreno (2012), private correspondence in the context of Irish emigration to Argentina seems to have played a key role when it came to firing the imagination of those back in Ireland who were considering emigration. The descriptions of prosperity and adventure often found in letters must have contributed to the whole process of emigration to this Latin American country. In fact, the preservation of emigrant letters has allowed for interesting insights into the motivation of emigrants going to Argentina. Crop failures, particularly after 1840, were important factors, but the real incentive for those who emigrated to Argentina, in general, appears to have been “a simple desire for a more secure life which offered hope for the future” (McKenna, 2000a, p. 82). According to Murray (2003a, p. 10), the typical emigrants were from the middle classes of mid-nineteenth century rural Ireland, with some exceptions. Delaney (2006, p. 10) points out that those originating from Longford, Westmeath and Wexford were not poverty-stricken: they were sons and daughters of medium-size tenants and farmers with relatively higher income than the emigrants to North America and other parts of the world, who were primarily labourers. The social background of this particular group of emigrants translated into a higher level of literacy than that shown in the letters written by other emigrants in CORIECOR, which explains why they are not as vernacular.

Although some of these emigrants in turn re-emigrated to other English-speaking countries such as the United States or Australia, nearly half the Irish immigrants settled on a permanent basis in Argentina (and Uruguay). Others crossed from Ireland to the United States temporarily or as part of a “stepwise” strategy that would eventually take them to Argentina. As indicated above, some of the Irish who settled in Argentina eventually managed to own their means of production (i.e. land and sheep), and by the mid-1860s they were “probably the most important group of primary producers of wealth in the country” (McKenna, 2000a, p. 100). As they prospered, they became an economically self-sufficient, socially clustered, and highly endogenous community (Murray, 2003b) which was able to preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage. Although it is true that they would eventually integrate better into Argentine society (see Graham-Yool, 1981, p. 162) than the English immigrants, and that some of them did not identify with labels like *Irish* (Murray, 2003b, p. 22), and wished instead to be

associated with the English, the Irish-Argentine community nevertheless made a point of preserving their Irish habits and traditions. They managed to “continue to speak English, socialize exclusively among themselves, and with the libraries supplying local Irish papers [such as the *Wexford People* or the *Westmeath Examiner*] remain psychologically back in Ireland” (McKenna, 2000b, p. 206). The foundation of English-speaking newspapers in Argentina was fundamental in the process of language maintenance. *The Standard*, a four-page weekly that started daily editions in 1861, and *The Southern Cross* in 1875 (focused more on Irish matters than *The Standard*) were both founded by Irishmen (see Kelly, 2009, p. 171-191; Delaney, 2006, p. 15; McKenna, 2000b, p. 206; and Graham-Yool, 1981, p. 159). The weekly *Western Telegraph* was also Irish and had preceded the latter despite its short life (1870-1872).

Immigration to Argentina in the nineteenth century was male-dominated (Kelly, 2009, p. 38). However, at the end of the century, a general decline can be observed in the male-to-female ratio, “indicating a universal increase in female immigration over the same period” (ibid.). The strong presence of women among emigrants was also noticeable from the Irish end, where “the proportion of women among emigrants rose steadily until women were outnumbering men in the decades of the turn of the century” (Jackson, 1984, p. 1006). This rise is attested in the Irish Censuses collected around this period, where the proportion of females emigrating “from the 26 counties that would later become the Republic of Ireland was 49.2 per cent” (see Fitzgerald and Lambkin, 2008, p. 191; and Akenson, 1993, p. 166). Although, as Kelly (2009, p. 58) argues, Irish-specific statistical and demographic data is disjointed due to the fact that the Irish were often classified as “ingleses” on arrival in Argentina, she has noted that, from the late 1850s, the Irish registered a higher proportion of female immigrants.

Evidently, not all emigrants wrote letters, and not all of the women who emigrated to Argentina communicated through letter-writing either, which means that studies focusing on this type of material are inevitably restricted by these constraints. In that sense, the evidence provided by private correspondence is only partially representative of the speech of a group of people (emigrants) who, in turn, are representative of a larger group (Irish English speakers at the turn of the nineteenth century in this case).

### **Data for this study**

The study of private correspondence is a good way of reconstructing how some of these Irish female emigrants and their descendants communicated. In order to be able to compare female to male discourse, two sets of letters included as part of CORIECOR have been studied. First of all, a collection of letters written by a group of Irish-Argentine women (Sally Moore, Fanny Murphy and Kate Murphy) belonging to the same family. The recipient of all the letters is their cousin John James Pettit, who was born in 1841 in Buenos Aires, ten years after his parents had emigrated from Wexford. John James and his father are a classic example of re-emigration: they ended up moving to Australia after John James’s mother’s death in Argentina. The letters, written between 1864 and 1875, are a good way for their authors to keep in touch with their cousin and uncle, and they provide valuable insights into language use among the Irish Argentine community. None of the letters written by John James as a reply to his cousins’ in Argentina are available, which is regrettable, as they might have allowed for

a more thorough study of the communication between these female authors and their male correspondent. The Pettit subcorpus contains 27 letters (31,601 words in total).

The second set of letters belongs to the Murphy family, a Catholic farming family from Haysland, Kilrane, also in County Wexford. John James Murphy, the eldest brother, emigrated in 1844 and brothers William and Patrick followed, while a third brother, Martin, stayed in Ireland. The letters were written between 1844 and 1886, and they have Martin Murphy as the main recipient. The most frequent writer in the Murphy subcorpus is John James, who, having arrived in Argentina ten years earlier, managed to buy land in Salto, thus becoming the owner of a farm, or *estancia* “ten times larger than the farms of his family in Ireland” (Murphy, 2006, p. 37), to which he later added other properties in Rojas and Venado Tuerto. The Murphy subcorpus used for the present paper contains 135 letters (289,413 words in total).

The CORIECOR component of Argentinian correspondence includes both published and unpublished letters, some of which are part of a monograph by Edmundo Murray (2006)<sup>iii</sup> that deals with private narratives of the Irish emigration to Argentina. For the purpose of the present study business letters were deliberately excluded, and, given the type of analysis I was interested in carrying out, only the letters written by male authors in the Murphy family were selected from the Murphy subcorpus<sup>iv</sup>.

Both subcorpora are interesting from a linguistic point of view. They are excellent sources of colloquial speech, which is noticeable particularly in the use of syntax and spelling. Example 1 below shows non-standard uses of *will* and of the third person form *gives* (instead of the imperative form); examples 2 and 3 illustrate phonetic representations of certain words (i.e. *unlucky* and *sea*, highlighted in bold), which are spelled as they sounded to the authors<sup>v</sup>:

- (1) I hope they are all well, **Will** you tell John if he has got about £ 2 convenient, **gives** it to Matty Pierce of the Barracks? (William Murphy to Martin Murphy, Salto, Buenos Aires, 20 July 1862).
- (2) For his time with sheep he has been very **unlookey** but I hope the change is now for the better (William Murphy to Martin Murphy, Salto, Buenos Aires, 20 July 1862).
- (3) I take this hurried opportunity to inform you that we have arrived safe here at present in good health, but the mood of all on board having suffered much from **say** sickness. (John James Murphy to Martin Murphy, Lisbon, 13 November 1863).

The letters also allow insights into characteristic Irish English usages that have survived into the present. The following lines, in example 4, show the use of the *be + after + V-ing* construction, which is one of the signature features of the variety of English spoken in Ireland and is more or less equivalent to *have + just + V-ed* in Standard English (see for example O'Keeffe and Amador-Moreno (2009) . Example 5 shows the use of the plural form *ye*, also characteristic of this variety (Amador-Moreno, 2010; Corrigan, 2010; Hickey, 2007; Kallen, 2013):

- (4) [...] you will remember that poor Gerald **was after dying**. (Sally Moore to John James Pettit, Buenos Aires, 26 December 1866).
- (5) [...] **ye** may rest content that an a censure or accusation will never be entertained against **ye** (Patrick Murphy to Martin Murphy, Estancia Caldera, 10 April 1874).

The contact with Spanish is also evident in some of the letters, which gives testimony of the peculiar linguistic situation that many of the Irish settlers in Argentina and their children, whether born in Ireland or in Argentina, shared. As Murray (2006, p. 191) points out, “for a vast majority of Irish Argentines Spanish was not the first language until the first decades of the twentieth century, and even in the mid 1950s some of them would better speak in English (though with several loanwords) than in Spanish”. Examples 6 and 7 illustrate this:

- (6) [...] They **señaled** (marked) for the year ending 1863, 5,389 lambs [...] The latter as a **medianero** with William (John James Murphy to Martin Murphy, Uncalito, 20 March 1864).
- (7) I am getting up a house of three rooms at the **Estancia** and also two small houses at two of the **puestos** for the shepherds (John James Murphy to Martin Murphy, Flor del Uncalito, 20 June 1865).

As mentioned above, some of the letters were published by Murray (2006) together with other “ego-documents” (van der Wal and Rutten, 2013) such as memoirs, in order to provide a window into the lives of the Irish emigrants who settled in Argentina. In his introduction to chapter four, which deals with the J. J. Pettit letters, he states that these letters have “a dominantly feminine tone and perspective” (Murray, 2006, p. 85), and it is precisely this observation by Murray that gave rise to the present study. The motivation for this paper, therefore, arises from the question whether there are any significant differences between the frequency and distribution of certain words and phrases in the letters written by female Irish emigrants and those written by male emigrants. However, it must be stressed from the outset that this is a case study. My claim is not that the patterns that emerge from this study are unique to Irish English, nor to the Irish female emigrant or the Irish-Argentine community. As we know, when dealing with language and identity issues, we need to bear in mind that, as Hidalgo-Tenorio (forthcoming) puts it, “[c]ommunication is a complex, context-dependent phenomenon in which numerous interrelated variables operate simultaneously”. In other words: the interrelation between factors such as the historical period, the family background of the letter writer, or the type of relationship s/he has with the letter recipient, for example, cannot be ignored<sup>vi</sup>. Also, no conclusions about language and gender can be extrapolated based on observing a small sample of data either. By the same token, while quantitative methods of analysis are a good way of investigating language use from an empirical viewpoint, I agree with McLelland (2007) and Moreton (2012) in their drawing attention to the challenges that statistical analysis can present. Results should be tested qualitatively in order to carry out a more informed analysis of the data, and should also be checked against different data sets by scholars from different disciplines in order to provide a more complete picture of the Irish female emigrant (Moreton, 2012, p. 644).



The present study employs corpus linguistic tools in order to identify linguistic patterns and analyse them in the context of Irish emigrant correspondence. It uses the concordancing program *Wordsmith Tools* (Scott, 2015), which allows for quantitative analysis through the use of frequency lists, concordance searches, keyword analyses, etc. that help us observe what patterns are used by what groups of letter authors, what the linguistic choices of those who wrote letters are, and what such choices reveal about their gender and their identity. All of this is discussed in the section that follows.

### Methodology and results

*Frequency lists* are used in corpus linguistic studies to highlight the most frequent words in a dataset. When we generate a frequency list for a particular corpus, the software searches every item in that corpus in order to show how many different words (or tokens) it contains. The list of items can be displayed in rank order, and the rank order of items in two or more corpora can be compared by looking at the lists side by side. Table 3 below shows the top 20 most frequent items in the Pettit corpus (representing female speakers) and the Murphy corpus (representing male speech).

**Table 3. Frequency data: Wordlists compared**

Pettit Letters (females)		Murphy Letters (males)	
1	<b>I</b>	1	<b>I</b>
2	A	2	A
3	THE	3	THE
4	TO	4	TO
5	AND	5	OF
6	OF	6	AND
7	YOU	7	IN
8	IN	8	THAT
9	IS	9	<b>YOU</b>
10	IT	10	IT
11	THAT	11	AS
12	<b>YOUR</b>	12	IS
13	HAVE	13	FOR
14	<b>MY</b>	14	THIS
15	FOR	15	BE
16	NOT	16	HAVE
17	<b>SO</b>	17	ON
18	<b>SHE</b>	18	AT
19	ARE	19	WILL
20	WE	20	ARE

The relatively high frequency of the interactive pronouns *I* and *you* is to be expected, given the type of source we are dealing with. Both *I* and *you* are used to refer to the participants themselves, and they signal their orientation towards each other (McCarthy, 1998; Biber et al., 1999). By comparing the two lists we can see that while fourteen out of the twenty items are common to both lists, the second person pronoun *you* occurs a few positions higher up the list in the female corpus, which also contains the plural form

*we* and the third person pronoun *she*, as well as the possessive forms *your* and *my*, all of them absent from the list of the top 20 words for the male writers.

The occurrence of pronouns is interesting, considering that these forms, as Wales (1996, p. xii) argues, “cannot actually be satisfactorily explained syntactically”. Pronouns “play a key role in the construction of ‘self’ and ‘other’. They are not merely a way of expressing person, number and gender as is suggested by traditional grammarians, nor do they only do referential and deictic work”<sup>vii</sup> (Bramley, 2001, p. v, quoted in Timmis, 2015, pp. 111-112). In the type of interaction that we are dealing with, where members of the same family engage in what is defined as “intimate”<sup>viii</sup> interaction through letter-writing, it could be argued, as Clancy (2016, p. 102) points out, that “intimates’ use of personal pronouns index community membership, thereby demonstrating participant mutual engagement in the joint enterprise of being intimate”. The fact that we find the plural pronoun *we* in the female corpus perhaps suggests a focus on group solidarity (ie. as an in-group mark, where *we*=our family), whereas the high frequency of the first-person and second-person possessive pronouns *my* and *your* may be an indicator of the focus on the recipient and the interaction between sender and reader. What stands out in particular when comparing the presence/absence of pronominal forms in both subcorpora is that the female writers seem to use a wider range of forms than the male letter-writers. These include referring to other females using *she*, probably motivated by the amount of narrative detail (Rühlemann, 2007) provided by the letter-writers in relation to the other women in the family. Also, when we take a closer look at the overall figures for first- and second-person pronoun usage, we notice that the overall percentage of first-person and second-person pronouns is higher in the letters written by women than in those written by men. Tables 2 and 3 show the frequency of first- and second-person forms respectively. In the first and second columns the raw figures are given, whereas the third and fourth columns show the normalised rates per thousand words so that data can be compared. The process of normalisation is useful when it comes to comparing figures across corpora of different size, as is the case here. As Evison (2010, p. 126) very eloquently explains, “the process involves extrapolating raw frequencies from the different-sized corpora which are being compared so that they can be expressed by a common factor such as a thousand or a million words”. In our case study, for example, the pronoun *you* occurs 403 times in the female sub-corpus and 790 times in the male sub-corpus, which might look like it is the men who use it more often in their letters. However, because the two sub-corpora have different sizes, the raw figures are deceptive. In order to be able to make the data comparable, we need to normalise the rates of use by taking the raw figures, dividing by the total word count of each corpus and multiplying it by 1,000, which gives us the normalised frequency.

**Table 4. Frequency of 1<sup>st</sup>-person pronouns compared**

	<b>Women No. Tokens</b>	<b>Men No. Tokens</b>	<b>Women Per 1,000 words</b>	<b>Men Per 1,000 words</b>
I	552	1,569	17.40	5.40
My	177	321	5.60	1.10
Me	66	366	2.08	1.20
Myself	9	53	0.20	0.10
Total	804	2,309	25.20	7.80

**Table 5. Frequency of 2<sup>nd</sup>-person pronouns compared**

	<b>Women No. Tokens</b>	<b>Men No. Tokens</b>	<b>Women Per 1,000 words</b>	<b>Men Per 1,000 words</b>
You	403	790	12.70	2.70
Your	187	237	5.90	0.80
Yourself	22	18	0.60	0.06
Ye	0	16		
Total	612	1,045	19.20	3.50

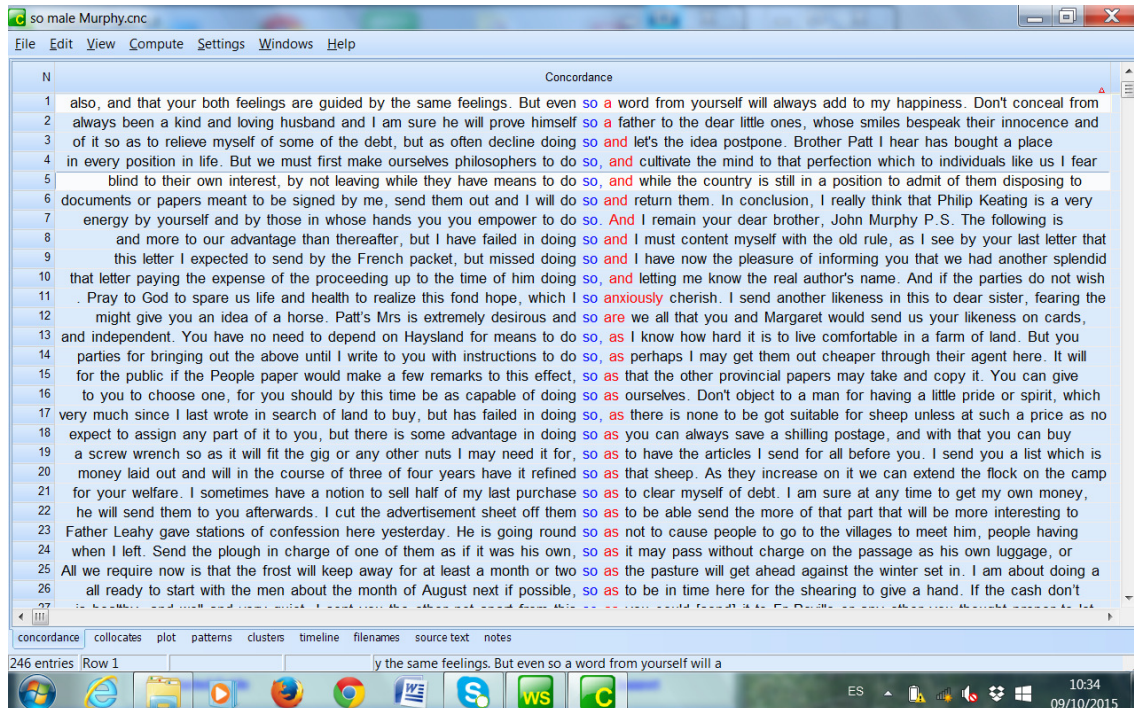
We can now see that both first- and second-person forms are more than twice as frequent in the sub-corpus of letters written by women than in that by men. The fact that first-person pronouns are used three times more frequently by the female authors than by the male authors can be interpreted as indicating greater expression of interpersonal involvement on the part of the female letter writers. I will return to the use of first-person pronouns below, when discussing clusters.

Table 5 shows 19.2 occurrences of *you* per thousand words in the female data, as opposed to 3.5 occurrences in the male data. This focus on the reader is also interesting as an involvement strategy, not only because it indicates female attention to the other, but also because it signals orality (i.e. showing perhaps a more acute perception of *letters-as-conversational-exchanges* on the part of the women).

The frequency list of the female subcorpus also shows a preponderance of the word *so*. In order to be able to determine if this is in any way significant we need to look at the concordance lines that show the word in context in both sub-corpora. *Concordance analysis*, also known as *KWIC (Keyword in context)* analysis, is useful when it comes to observing the patterns that are generated in the form of concordance lines, as shown in Figure 1. The screenshot in Figure 1 exhibits only a few examples, with the target (or node) word displayed in the centre. There are in total 246 examples of *so* in the male sub-corpus, and 135 in the female. A closer look at *so* in context in both sub-corpora reveals the type of functional categories that can be found in the letters for this word. Naturally, as would be expected, the type of text that we are dealing with here has some bearing on the catalogue and frequency of uses of *so* that we find. Thus, we notice *so* used as a discourse marker in closings (as in example 8 below), or as a subordinating conjunction often with a narrative function (example 9). However, we also find other

examples of subordinating *so* introducing complement clauses (10 and 11 below), *so* as a pro-form (example 12), and as a degree adverb, typically modifying adjectives or adverbs (as illustrated in example 13), all of which are less representative of letter writing:

- (8) John was bad for some days from the wound, the ball has not been extracted, he has seen three doctors, they were all of the opinion that he may never feel it, it must have settled in the flesh near the backbone, **so** my dear cousin you see how very near I was to have to tell you of many more deaths (Sally Moore to John Pettit, Buenos Aires, October 25th, 1875).
- (9) I sent you a likeness of hers with Fanny's and mine, and the other Eliza is a daughter of Uncle James who joined the French order of Charity, she took her family by surprise she came in on a visit to us and in a short time arranged everything with the Superioress without their knowing anything about it. Her brother-in-law came in sick in the meantime and when he got very bad Uncle James and Aunt Mary came in to see him, **so** a few days after his death she asked, and obtained their consent and on the first of January entered the community, and since then another young cousin of ours, a second cousin Mary Doolin has followed her example. (Sally Moore to John J. Pettit, Buenos Aires, February 23rd 1866).
- (10) I intend to send five or six flocks onto it next March, **so** as to make it pay for itself very quick. (John James Murphy to Martin Murphy, Buenos Aires, 26th October 1864).
- (11) In the month of March sheep-farmers were quite down in spirits from the bad appearance of the camps, but we have been favoured with plenty of rain with mild weather up to the end of June, **so** that the pasture got strong and beyond the danger of injury by the severe frosts which have now set in. (William Murphy to Martin Murphy, San Martín, Salto, 20th July 1862).
- (12) The season here now is delightful, it will continue **so** until about December when the weather becomes dreadfully warm (Kate Agnes Murphy to John J. Pettit, Buenos Aires, September 12th 1868).
- (13) I am glad to hear that your father has not forgotten his Spanish, he must have a very good memory to remember a language **so** long without speaking it. (Sally Moore to John J. Pettit, Buenos Aires, February 23rd 1866).



**Figure 1. Concordance lines from the male sub-corpus**

Of all these functions the most salient difference that can be observed by comparing both sub-corpora is in the use of *so* as an amplifier or intensifier, as illustrated in examples (14) and (15). In (14) the adverb *so* acts as an amplifier of the adjective *fat*, used to describe the writer's own daughter, while in (15) *so* is used to boost the meaning of *pleased*:

- (14) We are all going on as usual in the enjoyment of good health. Little Kate is growing fast, but from her being **so** fat it was against her walking, which she has now commences [sic]. (William Murphy to Martin Murphy, San Martin, Salto, February 20th 1866).
- (15) We received your father's likeness it was long expected as well as your own, how well and stout he looks, poor Mama was **so** pleased to get it. (Sally Moore to John James Petty, Buenos Aires, August 25th 1866).

Bearing in mind that the use of intensifiers tends to be associated first of all with colloquial usage, and, secondly, with emotional language, the fact that the females are leading in the use of intensifying *so* in the letters is telling. Table 6 shows the difference in the use of *so* as an intensifier in the male and female letters.

**Table 6. Uses of intensifying *so* in the male and the female subcorpora**

	<b>Women No. Tokens</b>	<b>Men No. Tokens</b>	<b>Women Per 1,000 words</b>	<b>Men Per 1,000 words</b>
So	22	14	0.60	0.04

As Bulgin et al. (2008: 110) point out, one of the most common generalisations about male and female speech is the claim that women often use more emotional forms (Jespersen, 1922; Lakoff, 1975; McMillan et al., 1977), a perhaps sexist perception of women’s language use as “deficient” to men that reflects the preconceptions of the time<sup>ix</sup>, but which must be credited for inspiring investigations and marking the start of a solid field of research into language and gender. Although recent research has distanced itself from such preconceptions, including the traditional view that certain intensifiers are distinctively female, some studies have recently revisited the role of intensifiers in discourse combining different methodologies. The tendency for females to use more intensification in general has been demonstrated in research dealing with present-day spoken English (see for example Ito and Tagliamonte, 2003; Stenström, 1999, p. 77 and Tagliamonte, 2005, p. 1909-10). In particular, Tagliamonte and Roberts, 2005 have demonstrated a female preference for *so*. In that sense, the gender-based differentiation in our data mirrors the results reported in contemporary studies, and seems to indicate that *so* as an intensifier appears in contexts where a higher emotional involvement on the part of the letter writer is in place. However, further analysis in similar historical contexts would be required in order to be able to reach any firm conclusions in this regard.

Finally, the *cluster* facility of *WordSmith Tools* allows us to identify the sequences of multi-word units that have the highest frequency in the texts under investigation. Clusters, as defined by Scott (2015), “are words which are found repeatedly together in each others’ company, in sequence. They represent a tighter relationship than collocates, more like multi-word units or groups or phrases”. In real spoken discourse, clusters “are known to have interpersonal functions – they reflect the interpersonal meanings (meanings which build and consolidate personal and social relations) created between speakers and listeners (writers and readers)” (Carter and McCarthy, 2006: 835). The cluster search method was applied to the letters with the aim of observing what words co-occurred with, or appeared in the company of, the self-referential first-person pronoun *I*. This was done in order to see how the writer’s personal feelings were conveyed in the letters and whether any differences between the male and the female writers could be noticed. Table 7 shows the results of the comparison between the two datasets for the most frequent words found in the two subcorpora<sup>x</sup>:

**Table 7. Cluster analysis of first-person pronoun *I***

Females			Males		
Verb	No.	Normalised per 1000 words	Verb	No.	Normalised per 1000 words
Hope	46	8.3	Think/thought	64	4
Will	44	7.9	Will	58	3.6
Think / thought	36	6.5	Hope	56	3.5
Receive	25	4.5	Shall	43	2.7
Send	24	4.3	See	42	2.6
Suppose	17	3	Send	41	2.6
Write	14	2.5	May	37	2.3

Must	13	2.3	Should	34	2.1
Believe	9	1.6	Can	33	2.1
Tell	8	1.4	Believe	32	2
Remain	8	1.4	Remain	31	1.9
Know	7	1.2	Expect	24	1.5
Expect	6	1	Know	23	1.4

The most evident difference when we compare both lists is that, in the male corpus, the use of *I* seems to be more dispersed, whereas in the female corpus it tends to collocate more regularly with the top 5-6 verbs on the list. Again, here, given the type of text that we are examining, it is not surprising to find verbs referring to the process of letter-writing, or verbs which are part of formulaic expressions such as “I *remain* dear brother, yours affectionately” (William Murphy to Martin Murphy, 18 July 1863, San Martin, Salto). A comparison of both lists, however, shows more metalinguistic reference to allude to the process of letter-writing through the use of verbs like *send*, *write* and *receive*, in the female subcorpus, while both men and women seem equally formulaic in their use of the verb *remain*.

Furthermore, as Moreton (2012) finds in her study, self-referential stance expressions conveying feelings through mental verbs (for example, *hope*, *think*, *know*, *believe*) are frequent in both sub-corpora. However, when we count these forms altogether we notice that the females appear to be more inclined than the males to express subjective opinions and feelings openly. A look at the wider context by zooming into the concordance lines for *hope*, for example, shows that, while similar uses of the verb can be observed in both subcorpora, the frequency is over twice as high in the female subcorpus (8.3 vs. 3.5). This may be regarded as indicating higher emotional value, given that the use of *hope* signals psychological proximity between author and reader, and, as such, its distribution can be interpreted as reinforcing the degree of solidarity between both parties. Examples (16) and (17) below illustrate the use of *hope* in the letters:

- (16) We are all in good health thanks be to God and I hope this letter will find all in Kilrane the same. (John James Murphy to Nicholas Murphy, 15 April 1844, Liverpool).
- (17) I am so glad to hear that your leg is getting well again you must have suffered very much from it and now I hope to receive your likenesses soon. (Sally Moore to John J. Pettyt, May 25th 1866, Buenos Aires).

A closer look at *I + think* also reveals interesting patterns of meaning. One notable difference between the two sub-corpora is that this verb is used by the female authors more often as a marker of spontaneous, unplanned discourse, imitating conversation, while the men employ it more frequently with the literal meaning of *think*, i.e. to express opinions. Examples (18) and (19) come from the female sub-corpus, while (20) and (21) are typical examples from the male sub-corpus:

- (18) I think I told you in a former letter that a sister of Fanny’s had entered the same convent as my sister Mary is in. (Sally Moore to John J. Pettyt, February 23rd 1866, Buenos Aires).

- (19) And now my dear Cousin, I think I will finish with warmest love to your father and yourself from Mama [...] (Sally Moore to John J. Petty, January 1865, Buenos Aires).
- (20) But I see but little reason for the tenant farmers of Ireland to indulge themselves with these hopes, as I think they cannot make out of the land the amount that is necessary to keep them living (even) comfortable. (John James Murphy to James Furlong, 22 December? 1864, Uncalito).
- (21) There has been no letter from John these last months. I think there is likely to be one missing as he was likely to write on receiving the money. (William Murphy to Martin Murphy, 18 July 1863, San Martín, Salto).

In (18) and (19) above the female writer uses *I think* to convey the uninhibited nature of her discourse, in the same way that speakers often insert these types of strings spontaneously in conversation. In (18) the letter writer is conveying that she knows some of the information she is sharing with the reader is not new but is providing a frame as a preamble to new information connected with the old news disclosed in a previous letter. In (19) *I think* is produced as part of a letter closure, and the sentence would still read as a closure without it, but the addition of *I think* is reader- as opposed to writer-focused and endows the closure with a less formal and more amicable tone. Far from expressing opinion or conjecture, as the male writers seem to do in (20) and (21), the use of *I think* in (18) and (19) appears to work towards building and maintaining solidarity<sup>xi</sup>.

Another interesting difference between both sub-corpora in relation to the collocation of *I* revolves around the verb *suppose*, which does not feature within the top verbs in the male list (see Table 7). As the female list shows, this verb appears 17 times in the letters written by the women, while the men only use it 5 times in total. Considering that *I + suppose* in the context at hand can be taken as an indicator of psychological proximity on the part of the writer, the fact that the women use it more frequently is significant, as it would seem to indicate an attempt on their part to build rapport with the reader. In using *I suppose*, the letter writers allow themselves to see or experience something from the point of view of the other, thus showing empathy and, sometimes emotional understanding, as can be observed in the examples shown in Figure 2.



1	s, about 40 leagues equal to 120 miles. <b>I suppose</b> her time has come to settle he
2	ome better papers than the Standard but <b>I suppose</b> as Spanish is not spoken there
3	n the house with us after her marriage. <b>I suppose</b> you hear often from Sally she
4	will what he does is all for the best, <b>I suppose</b> Sally must have told you that
5	d, Mrs. Kirk sends here to your father. <b>I suppose</b> he will not know it or Mama's
6	town. I sent your letters out to her so <b>I suppose</b> she is contented now. I think
7	t mail some likenesses and some papers. <b>I suppose</b> you have received them as our
8	God's Holy Will be done it was to be so <b>I suppose</b> and he would have died just th
9	but I assure they are. Dear John, Sally <b>I suppose</b> has given you an account of ev
10	likeness and one of my sister Maggie's, <b>I suppose</b> you have received it. We also
11	she had yours, now that she has got it <b>I suppose</b> she will be a constant corresp
12	ourse in that I cannot give my opinion, <b>I suppose</b> I was not even in the world wh
13	anny was to have written last month but <b>I suppose</b> the reason she did not was tha
14	er. I wrote to you by the October Mail. <b>I suppose</b> you have received it before no
15	ery large, we are now about a month in, <b>I suppose</b> we will soon be returning to t
16	as to keep house until they go out, but <b>I suppose</b> she has told you everything in
17	I hope to receive your likenesses soon. <b>I suppose</b> you have received ours ere thi

**Figure 2. Concordance lines for *I suppose* from the female sub-corpus**

Another observation that can be made from Table 7 is that the male sub-corpus presents more variety in the use of modal verbs. While it would certainly be interesting to have a closer look at how those modal verbs behave in the usage of both the females and the males, in order to determine the expression of epistemic meaning in the letters, space does not allow for a detailed analysis of modality here.

### Conclusions

The theme of this paper has been the exploration of different language patterns in a set of Irish emigrant letters written by men and women, in order to decipher whether any significant differences in terms of language use could be observed. By taking a corpus-driven approach, this study has employed a bottom-up analysis of the data, using different techniques generally employed in the field of corpus linguistics in order to explore the data without any preconceived ideas about what they might yield.

The motivation for such an approach comes from the question whether any salient differences between the letters produced by a group of Irish-Argentine female and Irish-Argentine male writers exist, as suggested by Murray when arguing that the female letters display “a dominantly feminine tone and perspective” (Murray, 2006, p. 85).

The results of the analysis carried out here show stronger interactional and emotional involvement in the letters written by the women in this study. Their use of first- and second-person pronouns indicates, first of all, a greater focus on the interaction between writer and reader, and secondly, a more defined expression of psychological proximity, displaying a higher degree of attention to the recipient of the letter. The use of the intensifier *so* also points to a greater expression of emotional involvement in the letters written by the females. In keeping with the corpus linguistics approach employed here, the expression of subjective opinions and feelings was measured through the use of mental verbs, which was also indicative of high emotional involvement.

The paper has also argued that the patterns found for second-person pronouns and for first-person pronoun *I* in combination with *think*, suggest a more acute perception of *letters-as-conversational-exchanges* on the part of the women, whose writing shows more spontaneity than the men's.

Clearly, a certain degree of caution is always necessary when interpreting small samples of data. However, the argument that a large amount of data is still only representative of the population it derives from can also be made. In that sense, the letters analysed here are no less representative of the Irish emigrant voice than the full catalogue that comprises CORIECOR, and CORIECOR as a corpus, in turn, is no less representative of the Irish emigrant voice than all the letters that were produced but not preserved. By the same token, the voices of those (male and female) emigrants who never wrote letters are not recorded nor represented in CORIECOR either.

As was indicated at the start, the results presented here are part of a case study. Further investigation into some of the patterns that emerge from this corpus-driven approach, such as the use of personal pronouns *we*, and *she*, the use of *so* in contrast with other intensifiers, and the expression of epistemic meaning in general, will shed light on the voices of Irish female emigrants. Nevertheless, the initial findings reported here indicate that there is ample scope for further research into gender differences in the speech of Irish emigrants, using CORIECOR.

## Notes

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<sup>ii</sup> Tables 1 and 2 are reproduced with permission from the author.

<sup>iii</sup> I am very grateful to Edmundo Murray for giving me access to all the letters, and for granting permission to use them. The letters come from the Anastasia Joyce Collection 1844-1881, Biblioteca Max Von Buch, Universidad de San Andrés, Buenos Aires, Argentina – Copyright Society for Irish Latin American Studies (SILAS).

<sup>iv</sup> In the CORIECOR corpus, some of the letters included in the correspondence belonging to the Murphy family are written by women.

<sup>v</sup> For a thorough phonological analysis of the letters see de Rijke (2016).

<sup>vi</sup> One other issue to bear in mind in terms of theories of audience design, which assumes that 'speakers take most account of hearers in designing their talk' (Bell 1984: 159), is that in the two subcorpora examined here, the design of the style of each letter author might have been determined by the addressee, so two questions worth investigating further would be first of all whether a subcorpus of letters written from women to women would give us different results, and secondly, how would letters written for one addressee compare to those that were perhaps designed for multiple addressees, as is the case with some of the Murphy letters. In Bell's (1984) audience design framework, he establishes a differentiation between what he calls 'auditors' (i.e. those who are known, ratified and addressed by the speaker), 'overhearers' (i.e. third parties whom the speaker knows to be there) but who are not 'ratified directly', and other parties whose presence is unknown, i.e. 'eavesdroppers'. In the case of emigrant letters, where often literate people read out to other illiterate members of the family, friends or neighbours, 'overhearers' and 'eavesdroppers' may have had a role to play in the design of styles.

<sup>vii</sup> For a discussion of the pragmatic variability of pronouns within various political contexts, see for example De Fina (1995), and Wilson (1990).

<sup>viii</sup> See Clancy (2016: pp. 1-7) for an overview of intimate discourse.

<sup>ix</sup> For a discussion on the evolution of gender ideologies and the role of language see Philips (2003).

<sup>x</sup> The cut-off point here is 1 per 1000 words.

<sup>xi</sup> See Kärkkäinen (2003) for a detailed analysis of *I think* from the point of view of what is known as *speaker stance* (i.e. ‘attitudes towards knowledge and commitment towards the status of the information offered’ (Kärkkäinen 2003, p. 14).

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