

'As Trumpy as it gets.'

An exploratory analysis of Trump-related words in a web corpus in Trumpist times

Lieven Buysse

1 Introduction

Dany Jaspers has always had a keen interest in the morphological productivity of words, including linguistic or logical constraints on theoretical options within such productive processes. Although Dany's work has largely focused on closed-class items, I would like to zoom in on what has lately become one of the most frequent proper nouns in many languages across the globe, viz. that of Donald Trump. It should come as no surprise that Dany is not a die-hard fan of Trump's and has regularly voiced sincere bewilderment at the man's successful race to the Oval Office. In this short contribution I will highlight some derivatives of the 45th US President's surname to gauge how he is viewed and described in certain media. Donald Trump launched his campaign in June 2015, became the presumptive nominee for the Republicans in May 2016 and was finally elected on 6 November 2016 to be inaugurated on 20 January 2017. Trump's distinctive style (or lack thereof), language and ideas have on the one hand been most divisive in American society but have on the other hand been taken as models for populist politicians at home and abroad, which makes him a relevant object of study.

2 Corpus

A particularly interesting resource to detect lexical innovations in written English is the NOW Corpus (News on the Web), developed by Mark Davies at Brigham Young University. The web interface of the corpus is freely available at

<https://corpus.byu.edu/now/>. NOW is a highly dynamic corpus that gathers texts published on news websites from 20 English-speaking countries, such as the UK, the USA, Ireland, Australia and India. Because it does this on a daily basis – and also updates the corpus with this frequency – its composition changes every day. The first texts date back to January 2010, and by the end of 2017 the corpus contained an impressive 5 billion words. The corpus does not discriminate between different types of texts: all text types that occur on the news site apart from advertisements are included. This gives a broad variety of texts such as news reports, editorials, and blogs. The web interface enables searches of word strings, allows for wildcards, can include collocations, etc. Search results indicate word frequency, publication date, source and the context in which the search string appears.

3 Trump and the like

The search *trump** yields hundreds of forms that start with *trump*. The basic form itself ranks first with 1,472,113 tokens, but of course not all of these refer to Donald Trump. The same holds for other hits such as *trumpet* and *trumpeter*. Among those forms that may have a significant portion of their tokens refer to Donald Trump we find words denoting the man's language (*Trumpism* – 1,874; *Trumpspeak* – 24), overall manner and style (*Trumpian* – 1,726; *Trump-like* – 625), political concepts (*Trumpcare* – 903; *Trumpflation* – 151; *Trumpocalypse* – 63; *Trumpenomics* – 22), election race (*Trumpmentum* – 382), supporters/opponents (*(Never-)Trumper(s)* – 221; *Trumpster(s)* – 201), etc. An analysis of all identified forms would be interesting, but within the limited scope of this contribution we will need to scale down to three cases: *Trumpian*, *Trumpist*, and *Trumpy*.

4 *Trumpian*

One of the most frequent words in the *trump** set is the adjective *Trumpian*, which is probably the most general designation of 'anything to do with Trump'. Given the high frequency of this word our perspective will be that of a quantitative collocational analysis, whereby we identify all lexical words that occur within four positions before or after the adjective. This may give us an insight into the types of concepts associated with Donald Trump. Table 1 lists the most common collocations involving *Trumpian* along with their frequencies.

Collocate	N
Sound	269
Era	30
Politics	28
View	24
America	20
Rhetoric	16
Style	15
Populism	14
Typical	13
Reality	13
Language	13
Classic	12
Alternative	12
Fashion	12
Distinctly	11
Proportions	9
Tweet	9
Fake	9
Republican	9
Policies	9

Table 1: List of most frequent collocates with *Trumpian*

The overwhelming majority of collocations are to do with Trump’s style (*sound, rhetoric, style, populism, language, fashion, proportions*) and much fewer with his political agenda or accomplishments (*politics, view, alternative, policies*). Interestingly, in 13 instances *Trumpian reality* surfaces, suggesting a difference between actual reality and the reality as Trump views or lives it.

5 *Trumpist*

The form *Trumpist(s)* ($N=208$) can occur both as a noun (indicating a Trump supporter or follower) and as an adjective (indicating ‘anything to do with Trump’, cf. *Trumpian*). The former account for 39.4% ($N=82$) of tokens of the form, the vast

majority of which are plural ($N=70$). A manual scan of all noun tokens of *Trumpist(s)* yields a list of words that directly modify them (Table 2). Unsurprisingly, most of these collocates are adjectives.

Domain	Collocates
Degree of commitment	dedicated, devout, enthusiastic, full-blown, hardcore (4), non-typical, Orthodox, real, staunch, truer, vocal possible, prospective, today's
Geography	small-town, suburban, those countries'
Emotional state	disaffected, fair and balanced, unrepentant

Table 2: List of collocates with the noun *Trumpist(s)*

A significant portion of collocates are adjectives that indicate a degree of commitment to Donald Trump and his ideas, ranging from *non-typical* to *hardcore* or even *truer*. This indicates a perceived split in Trump support between fierce supporters and those who are inclined to go along with at least some of his plans. Some of these adjectives can be considered rather neutral denominations (e.g. *dedicated, enthusiastic, real, vocal*) whereas others are likely to carry a more negative undertone (e.g. *hardcore, Orthodox*). Three collocates point at a temporal aspect in someone's commitment (*possible, prospective, today's*) whereas another three position Trump support geographically, even outside the USA. Finally, there are three collocates describing supporters' emotional states, two of which can be interpreted negatively.

The number of direct collocates for the adjective *Trumpist* are obviously more numerous than those for the corresponding singular and plural noun. In Table 3 the collocates have been categorized into five domains and within these a distinction has been made between those that can be considered relatively neutral and those bearing a negative connotation. In collocations within the domain of communication the collocate nouns are almost all quite neutral. This also holds when an organizational entity is referred to, but here it becomes clear that Trump and his followers have caused a new division within both their party and the country. A *Trumpist GOP*, for example, does not necessarily mean that the entire Republican Party stands firm behind Donald Trump but in any case signifies that a new faction within the GOP has arisen. Calling this an *army*, on the other hand, does not betray a favourable view of this group, neither do des-

ignations such as *a Trumpist deplorable* or *loon* in the category “people”. Within this category we also find two foreign referents that have taken on Trump’s style: the Dutch populist politician Geert Wilders and an Indian party. When it comes to ideology and politics the nouns with which Trumpist collocates are mostly pejorative (e.g. *bigotry, racism*) or can be interpreted ironically (e.g. *goodies*).

Domain	Collocates
Communication	appeals, arguments, banner, campaign, essays, messaging, news, political discourse, rally, rhetoric eyeroll, pretence, scapegoating
Organisation	alt-right, America (3), bastions, coalition (3), core, faction, GOP (3), movement (2), new guard, party (3), Republican Party, Republicans, right, times, variety, wing (2) army, fringe (2)
People	congressional candidates, critics, counterpart, delegates, figure, Geert Wilders, intellectual, member of the administration, Party of India, Republican, right-blogger deplorable, loon, populists, talking heads, trolls
Ideology/policy	Christianity (2), economics, ideals, nationalism (2), protectionism, trade policy, vision, worldview bigotry, black hole, fear, goodies, Islamophobia, jingoism, nightmare, nihilism, populism (2), racism, right wing blame, tribalism, trade war, uber-ego
Action	actions, behavior, direction, mould, remaking, ritual insurrection, provocation, rage, ridicule

Table 3: List of collocates with the adjective *trumpist*

We have not as yet teased out a more specific meaning of the adjective *Trumpist* than ‘anything to do with Donald Trump’. In order to do so more context is needed for each token of the word. I have selected a few representative examples that can demonstrate the meaning range it carries. The most obvious meaning is a simple reference to the person, as in (1) where a rally is called *Trumpist* because it was an event in support of Donald Trump and in (2) where pressure originating from President Trump is referred to.

- (1) I mean, self-defence is one thing, but going to a **Trumpist rally** with the express purpose of beating up fascists – what does that accomplish?
(Jamie Thomson, *The Guardian*, United Kingdom, 9 September 2017)
- (2) The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group annual statement seems to have survived **Trumpist pressure** better than the Group of 20 nations' statements earlier this year.
(Greg Earl, *The Interpreter*, USA, 16 November 2017)

One step removed from this is example (3), in which the times we are living in are dubbed *Trumpist*. A literal interpretation would merely signify that our times are heavily determined by this US President, but the author most likely intends to refer to the entire atmosphere that is characteristic of Trump's presidency (e.g. distrust of mainstream media, talking tough).

- (3) If he follows that trajectory again, he could become the superhero for **our Trumpist times**.
(Stephanie Bunbury, *Stuff*, New Zealand, 30 June 2017)

More specific elements of this atmosphere or of Donald Trump's style can also be in focus. In (4), for example, the Irish broadcaster Myles Dungan is asked to share his favourite poem and points out that he will not select a poem by his wife about him, which he claims would be "Trumpist". This appears to imply that a Trumpist selection would exude both nepotism and narcissism. Similarly, the Australian essayist Elizabeth Farrelly describes a situation in excerpt (5) in which an official investigating corruption in Australia was thwarted by the Australian government. She compares this to what happened to James Comey, who was dismissed by Trump as FBI Director allegedly because under his leadership the FBI had stepped up the Russia investigation against the President's entourage. *Trumpist* here may, therefore, mean something like 'abuse of power to secure one's own position'.

- (4) Despite the fact that I am married to a poet (Nerys Williams) and that there is a poem that may or may not be about me in her first volume, *Sound Archive*, I will not be **Trumpist** about my selection. The poem that has probably meant more to me over the years than any other is 'To My Daughter Betty, the Gift of God', by Thomas Kettle.
(Myles Dungan, *Irish Examiner*, Ireland, 20 March 2017)
- (5) But even that wasn't enough for these gluttonous fools. Still unsatis-

fied, they then worked to disembowel the very body that made the findings, pushing out Commissioner Megan Latham halfway through her appointed term and hobbling it into the future. Latham was forced to reapply for her own job and resigned. This is disgraceful. It's **Trumpist**. Latham was our Comey. Yet we barely whimper.

(Elizabeth Farrelly, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Australia, 3 June 2017)

Some authors even provide a meta-reflection on the term, as in (6), where “Trumpist behaviour” is explicitly defined in an article about increased tensions between the US and North Korea under Trump’s presidency.

- (6) Where there is muscle, there is credibility, though where that muscle is applied remains the true test of statesmanship. In the not so wise context of **Trumpist behaviour**, muscle is detached from sentience and cognition, to be applied only in the context of making a deal, ploughing in and hoping for the best.

(Binoy Kampmark, *Scoop*, New Zealand, 18 April 2017)

On the whole, one may wonder to what extent the adjective *Trumpist* itself has incorporated a negative connotation – or is on its way to do so –, turning at first glance neutral concepts, such as behaviour in (6) into negative ones.

6 *Trumpy*

If *Trumpist* and *Trumpian* can in themselves be interpreted as neutral designations, this can hardly be claimed for the variant *Trumpy*. Of the 161 tokens of this word in the corpus 83 can be related to Donald Trump, 37 of which are adjectives and 46 are nouns. Almost all nouns are (part of) nicknames for Donald Trump: *Grumpy Trumpy* (6), *Trumpy Bear* (5), *Trumpy Boy* (3), *Trumpy Pumpy* (2), *Rumpy Pumpy*, *Trumpy Pumpkin*, *Trumpy Caesar*, and *Trumpy Clown*. Clearly, none of these are terms of endearment. One token refers to Trump supporters (*the typical Trumpy*) and one is a nominalisation indicating ‘anything to do with Donald Trump’ (*the bad, the sad and the Trumpy*).

As an adjective *Trumpy* most often refers to Donald Trump’s style, and as with *Trumpist* and *Trumpian* it is often left to the reader to decipher what this means, or in any case to rely on their background knowledge to figure out what it could refer to. Yet, on occasion the author spells out explicitly what they mean by *Trumpy*: an outsider in (7), a specific type of conservatism in (8), an aspect

of Trump's economic agenda even as early as 2012 in (9), a characterisation of Trump's personality linked to his personal life in (10), and a highly specific character trait of Trump's in (11).

- (7) "I like that he's **Trumpy**, an outsider," he adds.
(Jason Markusoff, *Maclean's*, Canada, 19 May 2017)
- (8) I'd say that his shortlist is, well, "**Trumpy**" – conservative, yes, but with a contrarian or anti-Establishment streak.
(David Lat, *Above the Law*, USA, 18 May 2016)
- (9) But it will also have to reckon with its **Trumpy** conviction that whatever is good for business owners is good for America.
(Michael Grunwald, *Time*, USA, 25 October 2012)
- (10) There's an aspiring younger couple (Jay Duplass and Chloe Sevigny), but the real guest of honour is the very **Trumpy** Doug Strutt (John Lithgow), an overbearing, under-informed, supremely self-satisfied capitalist who arrives with his third wife (Amy Landecker) and kicks off the evening by assuming Beatriz is a maid.
(Alison Gillmor, *Winnipeg Free Press*, Canada, 24 June 2017)
- (11) "I just think she's not very well informed, so sometimes she gets in areas that she really hasn't thought through maybe. She's **Trumpy** in a little bit like that."
(*TV3.ie*, Ireland, 2 May 2017)

Interestingly, in a few cases *Trumpy* refers to the man himself without coinciding with him. In (12), for example, *Trumpy* is taken, on the one hand, as a specific type of behaviour that Donald Trump seems to have acquired gradually, and on the other hand as one that comes in levels of intensity. The latter is also implied in (13), where there is a superlative form of *Trumpy* behavior that can be found in Trump himself.

- (12) Trump five years ago was already highly **Trumpy**
(T. A. Frank, *Vanity Fair*, USA, 22 December 2017)
- (13) Even if Trump remains **his most Trumpy self**, an extended period of economic good news could mean voters separate their personal distaste from their evaluation of him as a president.
(Byron York, *Washington Examiner*, USA, 7 November 2017)

Although the Trumpy style of communication is considered a particularly salient characteristic of Donald Trump's personality, excerpt (14) suggests that this does not automatically emanate from within but is fostered by a purposeful strategy not only practised by the man himself but also by his aides.

- (14) But we do know that there's at least one other person Trump trusts to help him tweet in a particularly **Trumpy** way: the White House's director of social media, Dan Scavino.
(Abby Ohlheiser, *Chicago Tribune*, USA, 4 October 2017)

Finally, as (15) shows, *Trumpy* may equally refer to Trump support(ers), *red* referring to a Republican affiliation and *Trumpy* to the more specific Trump faction within the party. On the other hand, this also harbours some ambiguity, in that the people of Alabama could be viewed by the author as exhibiting behaviour similar to the President's.

- (15) Alabama is about as red and as **Trumpy** as it gets.
(Guy Benson, *Townhall*, USA, 13 December 2017)

7 Conclusion

This contribution makes no pretence to anything but a scanty reflection on the rise of a few words in the English language that are related to the rise of a most peculiar yet ultimately victorious presidential candidate. Although this president – unlike his immediate predecessor – is highly unlikely to be remembered and studied for his subtle rhetorical talent, words that describe him, his policies, actions and supporters can give us an insight into how the man is viewed by journalists of articles that are freely accessible online. The picture that emerges is mixed. *Trumpist(s)* and *Trumpian* are in themselves neutral designations indicating that someone adheres to Donald Trump's ideas or that something falls within the scope of his philosophy or policies. Parallels can then be drawn with other words carrying the same suffixes, such as *Methodist*, *feminist*, *Marxist*, *modernist*, *humanist*, *Keynesian*, *Edwardian*, *Presbyterian*, *Darwinian*, etc. The context in which *Trumpist(s)* and more particularly *Trumpian* surface are, however, often negative, which may have these words take on a more pejorative connotation in due course. *Trumpy*, on the other hand, already has this connotation, as it most commonly occurs in contexts of mockery. Of course this analysis has been merely exploratory but these Trumpy words may deserve more attention

as Donald Trump's presidency progresses (or as the case may be degenerates) and as the NOW corpus keeps on expanding.

To conclude, it is my firm belief that one day a corpus analysis of academic articles in the fields of formal linguistics and logic will yield words such as Jaspersist or Jaspersian, referring to adherents to the teachings of the great scholar Dany Jaspers. No mockery will be involved, only humble deference.