The Politics of Naming in Unusual Collocations Used by Trump in November and December 2020

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Abstract:
Collocations have been approached differently by different linguists, and a plethora of books have been written about this term. Since neologisms are intruding into English language, it is time now to look at some terminologies that hourly appear in English. The parameters by which linguists can judge whether a combination of newly formed bundle of words is classified as a collocation are made easier by the support of AntConc. Software which shows the MI score and the frequency of co-occurrence of these items in a specific context by a specific user. The present study may yield some results for lexicographers who are interested in creating new dictionaries of collocations. Further, teaching students these combinations in writing will extensively and effectively add to their authenticity in writing.

Keywords: corpus linguistics - collocates – Trump – AntConc – semantics – China Virus – concordance – constraints.
Introduction and rationale:

This is a corpus-based study dealing with a sociolinguistic analysis of the collocates used by Trump during his presidential campaign, and how far his idiostyle – as someone who is inexperienced outsider – is diverted from the norm of frequency of occurrence of the same words used in American National Corpus (ANC). The study looks at both consistency and variation in using particular discourse strategies in different contexts such as speeches, debates and media. Trump’s body language is not listed in the present study.

In the last four years Trump used strong verbiage, a profusion of lexis which were, and still are, of evasive and obscure content. These words are like:

Winning/ Stupid/Weak/Loser/Fake news/Deep State/ Political Correctness/ the Swamp/ smart/ tough/ dangerous/ bad/ veterans/Amazing/make America great again/tremendous/terrific/military/ out of control/Classy. (1)

(See appendix for full sentences.)

Other websites used words like: zero/you’ll find/bigly/huge (pronounced as yuge) (2)

Trump’s language is hyper-masculine and unhedged. His debates with his rivals like Clinton and Biden, as Sclafani (2017) posited, prove that he has a ‘uniquely idiosyncratic’ way of using ‘believe me’ phrase to encourage audience’s participation and to give him some legitimacy. Sclafani’s study is mainly a qualitative description of Trump’s words. Also, his use of ‘others’ is clear. Further, his word braggadocious, to use Trump’s idiolect, means boasting.

The rationale of the present study is twofold: first to see how far Trump bears a negative attitude towards China. This will be linguistically substantiated by examples from his speeches in the last few months. Second, the point that Trump violates the constraints of forming collocations will be verified.

Definitions of terms:

Halliday 1964 posits that the ‘tendency to co-occurrence is the basic formal pattern into which lexical items enter’ and this is ‘known as collocations’. Halliday proceeds that a lexical set is a group of words occurring together. This co-occurrence is discussed in table 3 below where AntConc shows how far the word virus is adjacent to the word China. Halliday provides three examples of ‘seat, chair and settee’ which closely co-occur with words like ‘comfortable and sit.’ Other examples are given by Halliday are ‘shop and emporium’ which show similar semantic properties but they have different ‘collocational range.’ In other words, the semantic equivalence of two words is not a criterion for having
the same collocational range. The two parts of the collocation which are called collocates do show mutual expectancy meaning that they mutually expect each other. Halliday proceeds defining the collocation criteria:

The formal criterion of collocation is taken as crucial because it is more objective, accurate and susceptible to observation than the contextual criterion of referential or conceptual similarity. Lexical choice therefore is different from grammatical choice… there is no line to be drawn between those that can and those that cannot be chosen. There are only more probable and less probable items . This type of choice is more complex than the systematic choice of grammar . (Halliday 1964: pp.33-35)

Halliday’s words show that it is much more easier to demarcate collocation criterion because they are more observable than those of grammatical structure.

**Previous studies:**


On the collocation level, Jeehee (2003) deals with pedagogical applications for adult non-native speakers of English learning lexical collocations and their relation to spoken fluency of English. Li et. al.(2015) deal with the syntactic, as well as semantic constraints governing the formation of collocations. Khairova et. al.(2018) deal with ‘Synonymous Collocation Pairs from a Text Corpus where synonymous collocates represent a problem for (NLP) natural language processing’. Biel, L. et al. (2018) deal with legal Collocations language used in the European Union meetings. It is a Corpus-based study of EU expressions used during their sessions. O'Dell & McCarthy (2008) only provide a long list of collocations used in English language in different contexts as work, lifestyle, environment and modern world. They also tackle strong collocations as ‘inclement weather’ and ‘auburn hair’ and weak ones as ‘broad agreement’, ‘broad smile’ and ‘broad accent.’ Their book addresses advanced learners of English. Gelbukh & Kolesnikova (2013) conducted ‘a series of computer experiments on verb-noun collocations using machine learning methods in order to test a linguistic point that collocations in
the language do not form an unstructured collection but are language items related via what we call collocational isomorphism, represented by lexical functions of the Meaning-Text Theory.’

Gelbukh & Kolesnikova are mainly interested in collocation to support their views in NLP which is a branch of linguistics to shed light on how computers help human to process any amount of data. Thus, it is worth noting that there exist constraints on collocation use. Gelbukh & Kolesnikova both show the necessity for linguists to ‘extract collocations from corpora and annotate them with lexical functions automatically.’

From the previous studies, it is worth mentioning that no other studies deal with this particular combination of words China + virus which is used by Trump in this particular period.

**Methods and theoretical framework:**

Ant-Conc. software 3.5.8 version will be used to statistically highlight the frequency of occurrence of the word *China* in 79 examples taken from 15 speeches delivered by Trump a few months prior leaving the office. The software will also display the most frequently adjacent constituents to the word *China* looking at the score of Mutual Information (MI).

**Analysis and discussions:**

*China* in Trump’s discourse

It is worth mentioning that the collocation *China virus* is not observed in ANC. Several examples of the word China have been elicited from the corpus, but the collocation is not observed in all files. Examples of the word China are manifested in 11th of September reports, travel guides, oral and telephone conversation, quotation and commercial articles. The following tables from (a) till (i) substantiate this fact, therefore stressing the assumption that Trump made up this unusual collocation probably to propagate a policy or to criticize China’s administration:
Table (a)

Table (b)
Table (c)

Table (d)
Table (e)

Table (f)

Table (g)
Though the word China is almost always collocated with ‘made in China, cups and Chinaware, best china for the visitors and fine bone china tableware’ (see Online dictionaries), in the last few months Trump used the word China in a specific way when he started naming the Covid 19 Chinese virus (3). He also talked of China as a human being:’” China has taken a very hard hit over the last few months… and China is very
smart”(4) Trump adds that ,”China tries to say that the virus comes from American soldiers.”(5)

In other contexts, Trump refers to China as an equivalent to the Chinese people themselves: China, they should do a deal. “Somebody should take on China.” He proceeds, “I call for a ban for people coming from China’(6) On another occasion Trump answered a reporter who asked why so many people died from Covid19 in USA:”Don’t ask me ,ask China”(7).Further , many people regard it unethical to associate a disease with an ethnic group.

In one of his speeches on Thanksgiving 2020, he says,

“Your mission to support our soldiers on the ground and deliver precious cargo where it needs to go, including transporting 18 tons of medical equipment during the China virus pandemic…. we’re going to have to do something because I look at what China was doing… They don’t want America First. You know why? Because China doesn’t want it. China expressed their wish, “Please get rid of America first,”(8)

Fifteen speeches by Trump were picked from the website: https://www.rev.com/blog/transcript-category/donald-trump-transcripts, and it has been found that Trump used the word China 79 times within 2 months before losing the election:

(Table 1) Frequency of occurrence of the word China
From the appendix, it is clear that Trump collocates the word *China* with negative issues like ‘plague/epidemic, the virus, secret bank account, wish America to die first’ and many other bad things like calling Covid19 as ‘that China thing, real dirt, higher deficit with CHINA, the president of CHINA is being transparent.’ See Appendix below.

The frequent occurrence of the word *China* is very clear in one of his speeches that lasts for 27 minutes, and it was hit 54 times in text 11. (See table 2 below):

![Concordance Plot of the word China](image)

(Table 2) Concordance Plot of the word *China*

On the syntactic level, the word *China* is adjacent to prepositions like *to* and *from*. Also it is preceded by verbs like *make* and followed by nouns like *virus, plague pandemic*, as shown in tables 3 and 4 below:
Table 3 showing the adjacent constituents of the word China (examples 1-17)

Table 4 showing the adjacent constituents of the word China (examples 19-36)

To translate both tables 3 and 4 into statistical data, one can use AntConc Software to see which adjacent constituent has the largest frequency, and also its range of occurrence. Figure 5 below shows that the highest range and frequency that occur most adjacent to the word China is the word plague where it occurs three times to the left and five times to the right:
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Table 5 showing the range and the frequency of the word plague

By clicking on the word plague which bears the highest frequency, as well as the highest range, one can have the next few strings where the word plague appears very adjacent to the word China. (See table 6 below):

Table 6 showing frequency of the word Plague to the left and to the right

-Constraints on collocations behavior:

Collocations do have constraints like syntactic, pragmatic, prosodic and stylistic constraints. It is worthy mentioning that a collocation is not an Idiom, as the former means a popular combination of two words which has a direct meaning, whereas the latter is a ‘stand-in for something else.’ Gledhill (2000) specifies 3 conditions for the existence of collocations: ‘co-occurrence, construction and expression’. As for co-occurrence, a collocation must be statistically frequent in a text. It should also contain a base (in this case it is the word VIRUS or PLAGUE) and a collocate functioning as modifying the base (in this case it is the word CHINA). It is clear then that Trump observed the first condition. Regarding the second condition of construction, it posits that a collocation is a relation between a lexeme (VIRUS) and a lexical grammatical pattern (CHINA VIRUS) a noun
modifying another noun in this case. The third condition is the pragmatic one which measures how far the collocation is pragmatically convenient in the situation. The question now is whether Trump uses collocations by chance or is there a significance of using the combination of China and virus? As far as language is concerned, using collocates is never random, and Trump intentionally uses these collocations to politically reach a target. The common use of MI score and adjacency principles in tables 3 and 4 above is a linguistic evidence of Trump’s intention to verbally attack China.

There is a clear evidence that Trump’s combination of both words, China and virus can be classified as a collocation, since they both satisfy the four parameters used by Eva Lucía Jiménez-Navarro (2019) who posits that the frequency of co-occurrence of both elements in the corpus, the degree of the semantic compositionality with the semantic transparency, and the existence of both Headwords in the combination are all elements applicable to Trump’s collocations. By compositionality, Jiménez-Navarro means that the ‘semantic interpretation is a compositional function of the elements of which it is composed’

Limitation of the present study:

A question arises now: does Trump talk behind closed doors in the same manner as he talks on mediated discourse? In other words can future studies capture both FRONTSTAGE and BACKSTAGE talk? A researcher will be so lucky gaining an access to that BACKSTAGE talk. It is known that televised interviews are heavily edited, and this makes it, by logic, unnatural and unauthenticated. Further, any data-based study is limited by itself because Trump’s speeches and his use of vast stock of vocabulary are immense, and some of his speeches are highly confidential, especially when he deals with national security advisers. The efforts to make a larger dictionary comprising synonyms and collocations are still far from feasible. These efforts need a large team of linguists who will extensively divide these collocations into genres like legal, medical, and military ones.

Another limitation of the present study is whether Trump’s collocation (CHINA VIRUS or CHINA PLAGUE) will appear in any Monolingual Dictionary in the coming 50 years. This dictionary of course must be phrase-centered not word-centered, which makes the whole process a labor-intensive one, even with the support of a computer software.

Pedagogical Implications:

It is well known that adding new collocations to the language is enrichment for both language and its learners. Creating new collocations adds new semantic dimensions to meanings and their ranges in the language. Teaching our students to use collocations properly makes their
language look natural, and also makes them easily remembered because language is acquired in chunks. For instance, students can learn the collocation regular exercise faster than exercise. Also, students can learn richer ways to express themselves. Collocations syntactically contain different parts of speech where students can parse each one separately like: excruciating pain (ADJ. + NOUN), surge of anger (NOUN + NOUN).

Notes

Websites cited

YouTube links
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XsNeL5188 (defining the term Meta-discourse.

References


Appendix (1) famous words used by Trump

Winning

“My whole life is about winning. I don’t lose often.”

Stupid

I went to an Ivy League school. I’m highly educated. I know words. I have the best

Weak

I am strong; politicians are weak.

NBC is weak.

Loser

Show me someone without an ego, and I’ll show you a loser -- having a healthy
ego, or high opinion of yourself, is a real positive in life!

Fake News

Only Fake News, not the entire media but a large percentage of it, qualifies as an
enemy of the American people...

Deep State

The Deep State and the Left, and their vehicle, the Fake News Media, are going
Crazy - & they don’t know what to do.

Political Correctness

We’re running a war by politicians and we’re running a war by political correctness
as per that question [with ISIS].

Drain the Swamp

I’m draining the Swamp, and the Swamp is trying to fight back. Don’t worry, we
will win!

smart

I was a great student at the best college in the country. You know? I want to let
people know. I’m a smart guy.

tough

When somebody challenges you, fight back. Be brutal, be tough.

dangerous

Something really dangerous is going on.

bad

Something bad is happening.

veterans
At the same time, we're going to take care of our military and we're going to take care of our great, great, great veterans.

Amazing. Yesterday was amazing -- 5 victories.

make America great again
We will make America strong again.

tremendous
We have in Social Security right now thousands and thousands of people that are over 106 years old. Now, you know they don't exist. They don't exist. There's tremendous waste, fraud, and abuse, and we're going to get it.

terrific
(On British Prime Minister Theresa May) But I've actually gotten to know her better than ever, and I think she's a terrific woman. I think she's doing a terrific job.

military
I think I have great knowledge of - for military, and I think I have better vision for Syria than a lot of the so-called great military geniuses that are saying how to fight the war with Syria. In my opinion, they're doing just the opposite. Are we going to start World War III over Syria? Are we going to be there for the next 40 years?

out of control
Our country is out of control. This voting system is out of control.

classy
I built the Grand Hyatt right next to Grand Central Station - beautiful, classy job - but then the city denied my request to have the top 10 floors illuminated with my face at night. Can you believe that?
Appendix (2) the word “CHINA”

The following 79 examples can be retrieved from: https://www.rev.com/blog/transcript-category/donald-trump-transcripts, which is a website containing Trump’s transcripts of his speeches during the two months prior to leaving office.

1. I’m going to rejoin Paris Accord and make CHINA abide by what they agreed to. Donald Trump: (24):

2. about the work your son has done in CHINA and for a Ukrainian energy company when you

3. nophobic but not because he shutdown access from CHINA. And he did it late after 40 countries had

4. secret bank account with CHINA, does business in CHINA, and in fact, is talking about me taking

5. became president. I saw what was happening with CHINA and Russia and others. And it’s really

6. to make the windmills in both Germany and CHINA and the fumes coming up, if you

7. that this president paid 50 times the tax in CHINA as a secret bank account with CHINA, does

8. trade deficit. President Donald J. Trump: (22:06) CHINA ate your lunch-
	[crosstalk 00:00:22:07]. Vice P

9. with Mexico. President Donald J. Trump: (22:09) CHINA ate your lunch, Joe. And no wonder your

10. is too much. Should have never happened from CHINA. But what happened is we closed it down

11. like? Joe Biden: (09:41) What I’d make CHINA do is play by the international rules, not
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12. in CHINA as a secret bank account with CHINA, does business in CHINA, and in fact, is
13. I want America First. You know why? Because CHINA doesn’t want it. CHINA expressed their wish, “
14. of the Paris Accord, it was so unfair. CHINA doesn’t kick in until 2030, Russia goes
15. money. Didn’t come from CHINA. Donald Trump: (11:44) No, no. You know who the
16. know why? Because CHINA doesn’t want it. CHINA expressed their wish, “Please get rid of America
17. kept it from going into the rest of CHINA for the most part, but they didn’t
18. at the beginning. When I closed and banned CHINA from coming in heavily infected and then ultimate
19. what we can’t do. Look at CHINA, how filthy it is, look at Russia, look
20. this thing about, what are you talking about, CHINA. I have not had the only guy
21. president he made a fortune in Ukraine, in CHINA, in Moscow and various other places. Vice Presid
22. he’s being transparent. The president of CHINA is being transparent. We owe him a debt
23. car market of the future. In the meantime, CHINA is doing that. We’re going to
24. to deal with? Is it Russia? Is it CHINA? Is it North Korea? Sir, is it North
25. to them pay. Donald Trump. (11:30) First of all, CHINA is paying. They’re paying billions and
26. the only guy who made money from CHINA is this guy. He’s the only
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27. to fight this horrible disease that came from CHINA, it’s a worldwide pandemic. It’s a pandemic.

28. property. You have to have a partner in CHINA. It’s 51%, we would not do that.

29. who the taxpayer is? It’s called CHINA. Joe Biden: (11:46) Not true. Donald Trump: (11)

30. only one. Nobody else has made money from CHINA. Kristen Welker: (08:25) President Trump: Donald

31. want to ask you, Vice-President Biden, about CHINA. Let’s talk about CHINA more broadly.

32. Let’s get off the subject of CHINA. Let’s talk about sitting around the

33. 85. I was thinking about doing a deal in CHINA, like millions of other people, I was thinking

34. Biden, about CHINA. Let’s talk about CHINA more broadly. There have, of course, President Trump

35. racist even, because I was closing it to CHINA. Now he says I should have closed it

36. the steel. We have a higher deficit with CHINA now than we did before. We have the

37. was prior to the plague coming in from CHINA. Now we’re rebuilding it and we

38. 85) if this stuff is true about Russia, Ukraine, CHINA, other countries, Iraq. If this is true, then

39. Coronavirus. If you were president, would you make CHINA pay? And please be specific, what would that

40. specifically are you going to do to make CHINA pay? You’ve said you’ve said you’ve said
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41 the Biden: (11:46) Not true. Donald Trump: (11:46) CHINA pays 28 billion, and you know what they did

42 ______ history. We closed it down because of the CHINA plague. When the plague came in, we closed

43 ______ tame originally, but ultimately get rid of the CHINA plague. You see what’s happening in

44 ______ons. Kristen Welker: (11:22) President Trump, on CHINA policy—Joe Biden: (11:24) That’s not true.

45 ______ setting up air identification zones in the South CHINA Sea. You can’t fly through them.

46 ______ didn’t you get the world: CHINA sends up real dirt into the air. Russia

47 ______ the people we had in the ground in CHINA should be able to go to Wuhan and

48 ______ that your company has a bank account in CHINA. So how can voters know that you don’t

49 ______ spokesperson for the illustration when I went to CHINA that I said, Why are you moving

50 ______ in from CHINA, the plague, the plague from CHINA, the horrible situation. And we had to shut

51 ______ should’ve never happened. Came in from CHINA, the plague, the plague from CHINA, the horrible

52 ______ it clear, which we were making clear to CHINA, they had to be part of the deal,

53 ______ political statement. Let’s get off this CHINA thing, and then he looks, x93 The family

54 ______ you. Donald Trump: (24:22) Is he going to get CHINA to do it? Kristen Welker: (24:23) No, we
Donald Trump: (24:23) Is he going to get CHINA to do it? Kristen Welker: (24:24) We have to

He has caused the deficit of the CHINA to go up, not down, with CHINA, up,

with a billion and a half dollars from CHINA to Joe Biden: (11:08) Not true. Donald Tru

we had 44 people that were in there in CHINA trying to get the Wuhan to determine what

the CHINA to go up, not down, with CHINA, up, not down. We are making sure that

before and then we got hit with the CHINA virus and that certainly, you had to go

scientists who have waged the battle against the CHINA virus and we give thanks for the vaccines

reporting 18 tons of medical equipment during the CHINA virus pandemic. Keep up the outstanding work. G"e

. Pfizer announced on Monday that it’s CHINA virus vaccine is more than 90% effective. This fa

to do something because I look at what CHINA was doing, and Russia was doing, others are

heavily infected and then ultimately Europe, but CHINA was in January. Months later, he was saying

. You didn’t want me to ban CHINA, which was heavily infected. You didn’t want me to do that.

two, we’re in a situation where CHINA would have to play by the rules internationally

this election, that Russia has been involved, CHINA’s been involved to some degree, and
89 around the country, all around the world. And CHINA’s building a new road to a

70 fault that it came here. It’s CHINA’s fault. And you know what? It’s
71 that it came here either. It’s CHINA’s fault. They kept it from going
72 one person is too much. It’s 92s CHINA’s fault. It should have never happened.

73 stopped it from going in, but it was CHINA’s fault. And, by the way, when
74 lot. Russia’s paying you a lot. CHINA’s paying you a lot on your
75 . He talks about the art of the deal. CHINA’s perfected the art of the steel.
76 rest of our friends with us saying to CHINA, These are the rules. You play by
77 two, I don’t make money from CHINA. You do. I don’t make money
78 ‘t know how many people died in CHINA. You don’t know how many people

79 sure that in order to do business in CHINA, you have to give all your intellectual property.