

Tuomas Räikkönen

**AMERICA IS STRONG, AMERICA IS  
PROUD AND AMERICA IS FREE**

A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis of Barack  
Obama's and Donald Trump's State of the Union

Addresses

# ABSTRACT

Tuomas Räikkönen: America is strong, America is proud, and America is free  
A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis of Barack Obama's and Donald Trump's State of the Union Addresses  
Master's Thesis  
Tampere University  
Master's Programme in English Language and Literature  
October 2021.

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This thesis analyzes the State of the Union Addresses by former Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump. The State of the Union address is a constitutionally mandated speech which the president shall address to the congress annually. The material consists of the first four speeches by Obama and four of Trump's.

The study has two foci: Firstly, it focuses on the concordance lines of "America is" in order to analyze which traits the presidents assign to America.

Secondly, this study analyzes the collocates of "America\*" that are work and economy-related. The purpose of this is to find out which aspects of the economy are valuable to the speaker, and whether the collocates reveal anything of the target audience of the speech.

The results show that Trump used "America is" significantly more often than his predecessor. Obama's instances referred mostly to strength and power while Trump's, in addition to strength and power, also referred to making allies, productivity and the American exceptionalism. Trump's instances also shifted from making allies and strength and power to the American exceptionalism and productivity toward the end of his term.

The collocate analysis shows that Trump referred to America significantly more often than Obama. Obama also seemed to address white-collar workers more, since he used more words referring to skills and businesses. Trump, however, seemed to address the blue-collar workers, since he repeatedly used the word worker and had collocates such as *grit*, *labor* and *taxpayers*.

Key words and terms: corpus-assisted, discourse analysis, corpus, CADS, state of the union, political speech

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

# TIIVISTELMÄ

Tuomas Räikkönen: America is strong, America is proud, and America is free  
A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis of Barack Obama's and Donald Trump's State of the Union Addresses  
Pro gradu -tutkielma  
Tampereen yliopisto  
Englannin kielen ja kirjallisuuden maisteriohjelma  
Lokakuu 2021

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Tämä tutkielma analysoi kahden Yhdysvaltain presidentin Barack Obaman ja Donald Trumpin Kansakunnan tila -puheita. Yhdysvaltain perustuslaissa on määrätty, että presidentin tulee vuosittain antaa Kansakunnan tila -puhe kongressille. Tutkielman materiaali koostuu Obaman neljästä ensimmäisestä puheesta ja Trumpin neljästä puheesta.

Tutkimuksessani keskityn kahteen asiaan. Ensiksi tutkin puheiden "America is" (Amerikka on) ilmauksia ja niiden kontekstia analysoidakseni millaisia ominaisuuksia presidentit yhdistävät Amerikkaan.

Toiseksi keskityn "America\*" -sanan kollokaatteihin. Näistä kollokaateista analysoi ne, jotka liittyvät keskeisesti työhön ja talouteen. Tämän analyysin tarkoitus on selvittää, mihin asioihin presidentit keskittyvät, ja paljastavatko kollokaatit jotain siitä, millaiselle yleisölle presidentit ovat kohdentaneet puheensa.

Tuloksen osoittavat, että Trump käytti "Amerikka on" -ilmausta huomattavasti useammin kuin Obama. Obaman lainaukset viittaavat pääosin voimaan ja valtaan, kun Trump edellä mainittujen lisäksi viittasi liittolaissuhteiden luomiseen, tuottavuuteen ja Amerikan erityislaatuuteen. Kautensa alussa Trump viittasi enemmän voimaan ja valtaan sekä liittolaissuhteiden luomiseen, kun taas kautensa lopussa hän keskittyi Amerikan erityislaatuuteen ja tuottavuuteen.

Kollokaattianalyysi paljastaa, että Trump viittasi Amerikkaan huomattavasti useammin kuin Obama. Obaman kohdeyleisö vaikuttaa olevan ylempi keskiluokka, sillä hän käytti kollokaatteja kuten *skills* (taidot) ja *businesses* (bisnekset). Trump puolestaan tuntui kohdistavan puheensa työväenluokalle, sillä hän painotti sanaa *worker* (työntekijä) ja hänellä oli enemmän työntekoon liittyviä kollokaatteja.

Avainsanat: korpus, diskurssianalyysi, korpusavusteinen, CADS, state of the union, poliittinen puhe

Tämän tutkielman alkuperäisyys on tarkistettu Turnitin-alkuperäisydentarkistuspalvelussa

## Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
2	Previous studies on the presidents' speeches .....	3
2.1	Obama.....	3
2.2	Trump .....	4
3	Theoretical framework .....	6
3.1	Critical Discourse Analysis .....	6
3.2	National identity .....	7
4	Data and Methods .....	9
4.1	Data.....	9
4.2	Method.....	11
4.3	Process of Analysis.....	13
5	Results and Discussion .....	15
5.1	Concordance Analysis of "America is" .....	15
5.2	Collocate Analysis of "America*" .....	19
6	Conclusion.....	22
	References .....	24

## 1 Introduction

President Barack Obama and his successor president Donald Trump are very different as persons and as presidents. Obama was often praised of his statesmanlike appearance and behavior. Even the press worldwide was excited about Obama coming to office in 2009 (Takala et al. 2013). Trump, however, was often criticized for lacking such characteristics. The speeches and rallies of the two presidents were also very different. Trump often spoke unscripted, or at least it appeared that way (Lakoff 2016 [Blog post]).

In my thesis I will analyze State of the Union addresses by presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump. I have chosen four speeches from both presidents, and the study has two foci: First, I analyze what kind of national identity they portrait. I aim to find out if the former presidents Obama and Trump address similar attributes to America by looking at the phrase: “America is” and its concordance lines from the material.

Second, I will look at the collocates of “America\*” from the speeches. I will focus only on the lexical collocates that are in relation to work and economy. Some collocates surely are more obvious, but I will manually look at the concordances of those that are opaquer in order to find out whether they refer to work and economy. I will focus on these collocates, because the economy is important for the American mindset and tied to “the American Dream”. I also think that the differences in these collocates might reveal the different types of audience the presidents are addressing.

In my analysis I use Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies, which is a subset of Discourse Analysis. My theoretical background comes from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) because the President of the United States is one of the most powerful people in the world and thus has a lot of power to use. As van Dijk (2000: 94) suggests it is valuable to study the language of politicians since they form the elite that has the power to control governmental resources and laws. I employ corpus linguistic methods to find the immediate co-text of certain keywords, after which I analyze the findings in more detail.

By using corpus-assisted discourse studies I aim to shed light to what kind of attributes the presidents assign to America. Also, through collocate analysis I aim to find out which

aspects of economy are central to the presidents, and secondarily if these collocates reveal something about the target audience of the speeches. My research questions are as follows:

1. What kind of America are the presidents portraying in their speeches?
2. How do the presidents represent America through the work and economy-related words that co-occur with “America\*”?

## **2 Previous studies on the presidents' speeches**

Former US Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump are in many ways very different types of characters. Obama had a career in law before he got elected to his legislative career in State and US Senate. In contrast, Trump got straight into presidency from business world outside of politics, which was also a significant part of his campaign. He claimed that politicians were not trustworthy and often called his opponent Hillary Clinton “crooked-Hillary” during his campaign.

The State of the Union addresses have attracted a great deal of scholarly interest. There are studies analyzing different aspects present in individual speeches and larger diachronic studies. Teten (2003) studied the evolution of rhetorical presidency and development of the State of the Union address from George Washington to Bill Clinton. He concluded that the use of the pronouns “we” and “our” has increased in the addresses since the 1914 speech by Woodrow Wilson. This might be due to “going public”, i.e., addressing the speech orally. The reasons behind this change are unclear but it is speculated whether the president has wanted to show togetherness with the ever-widening audience (Teten 2003: 342 – 343).

When it comes to collocates in political discourse, Anita Fetzer (2014) examined the distribution, collocates and functions of the phrases: *I think*, *I mean*, and *I believe* in political discourse. She notes that a variational approach of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies is needed to “capture the fine details of the interplay of pragmatic markers and parenthetical constructions in discourse” (Fetzer 2014: 90).

### **2.1 Obama**

Barack Obama was the first black president elected in 2008. His charisma and statesmanlike appearance were well appreciated around the world. Takala et al. (2013) studied how a leading Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat talked about him during his first six months in office. They conclude that on the whole Obama was reported to have “extraordinary personal characteristics and to behaving in an exceptional way” (Takala et al. 2013: 162).

Ambrosio et al. (2020) studied Obama's geopolitical discourse in his State of the Union Addresses. According to the study, Obama had criticized his predecessor George W. Bush's overemphasis of Middle East in geopolitical discourse. They concluded that while Obama's speeches showed more geographic diversity and added focus on domestic affairs, the focus still was on Middle East.

## **2.2 Trump**

President Donald Trump is by no means a flavorless person. During campaigning and his presidency, he gained many loyal followers, but also arouse a lot of resistance. As NBCNEWS (nbcnews.com, accessed on 15 March 2020) reported, more than 200 people were arrested in Anti-Trump protests in Washington DC during Trump's inauguration. Many complained that Trump divided the country, though there were also those who think the division began already during Obama's presidency. Because Trump is such an interesting character, his speeches and utterances have also been studied in detail.

Chen (2018) studied Trump's inaugural speech from the perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar. According to Chen, Trump used material processes to imply that he can change the current situation in the country. He used those processes to waken American's patriotism and trust to government implying that he transfers the power back to the people (Chen 2018: 5, 9). Trump also used relational processes to encourage every American to rise for the occasion and come together to build a better nation. He encouraged them to work hard for a great future which they all could enjoy (Chen 2018: 5).

Chen also says that Trump sided himself with the people and addressed the Washington elites as "they" to show separation with Americans and elites (Chen 2018: 6). This is a persuasive tactic not only because Trump himself came from outside of the political elite though he certainly was a successful person before.

Rachman & Yuniarti (2017: 12-13) have similar results with Chen. They state that Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again" told the listeners that they have the ability



to change the course for the better and invited them to work with him for that goal. They claim that Trump used soft power in his rhetoric which means using speech and persuasion to gain power instead of force and violence.

### **3 Theoretical framework**

#### **3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis**

As the old saying goes, the pen is mightier than the sword. Language is a powerful tool and especially those in power have the ability to change others' lives through language. In Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) the focus is often on the interrelations between language, society, and power (Wodak 2001: 2). Language is seen as affecting society and vice versa. Furthermore, the purpose of CDA is to reveal the power structures and unmask the ideologies in power, because dominant ideologies are often unchallenged in societies, which might lead to group think and not being open to other ideas (Wodak and Meyer 2009: 8). However, with the rise of social media the traditional media no longer have the ability to fully control the ideologies. Now that anyone can have a substantial following, the ability to challenge dominant ideologies is present. Still, politicians are those that are in power and control the rules, though not necessarily the ideas. According to van Dijk (2000: 94), the language of politicians should especially be studied, because they form one of the specific elite groups that are greatly involved in reproducing the language and ideologies.

CDA often analyses the language of those in power (e.g., politicians) (Wodak and Meyer 2009: 9). Language use is one of the most central means for politicians to maintain social control (Fairclough 2001: 2). The power that politicians have, can be divided to two types. Firstly, they can influence the process of legislation and thus regulate the lives of the people. Secondly, they have visibility given by the media due to their public status, which further enables them to shape the discourse (ibid.).

There is also criticism towards critical discourse analysis. Jeffries and Walker (2012: 214) argue that the term "critical" is often taken as political and usually Marxist standpoint in CDA and other "critical" fields of study. They add that context plays a big role in discourses and some discourses can be seen as totally different from the other side of the political aisle. Therefore, the neutrality of the researcher is of great importance.

Jeffries and Walker (2012: 209) also argue that data collection should be as clear as possible, and not colored by the researcher's ideology often seen in CDA. Using keywords and collocates in data gathering one might be tempted to silence one's own ideology. Combining research methods may bring the research closer to objectivity. Keyword searches will not reveal everything from the text, but they will direct the researcher to important contexts and highlight discourses and ideology. Therefore, it can be resourceful to combine qualitative and quantitative research methods (Baker 2004: 347).

### **3.2 National identity**

State of the Union address to the congress is a type of speech that describes the situation in the country at the moment, and describes in which direction the president wishes to see the country develop. Speeches like this offer a great resource for analyzing what kind of identity the speaker assigns to the country. In the case of State of the Union, the speaker constructs national identity.

American exceptionalism is widely known. The idea that America is "a City on a Hill", acting as "beacon of hope" for everyone. The idea that America is somehow exceptional and should be the leader of the free world is known to many living outside of the country. Perhaps even more famous is the idea of the American Dream. The American dream famously means that everyone should be free and equal, and with that freedom everyone should chase their dreams and be able to rise to the top despite any hardships or a poor background.

Different countries have different types of national identities. In Austria, the concept of *homo Austriacus* represent the idea of common culture in the past, present and the future (Wodak et. al. 2009: 4). In America, the melting pot of the world, the national identity is more often seen to constitute around common values and ideas despite of different backgrounds. Though there certainly are many differences in every country, especially in the US, Wodak et al. (2009: 4) argue that discourses constructing the national identity largely focus on intra-national unity and ignore the differences. Recently, studies focusing on the discursive construction of national identity have been conducted for example

around British national identity in relation to leaving the European Union (see Riihimäki 2019, Wenzl 2019).

National identity is a type of social identity. Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 585) propose that identities are relational. Different discourses constitute the identities in relation to others. As well as any other identity, national identities are constructed by discourses and thus are also in constant change (Wodak et al. 2009: 4). Thus, it is of value to constantly pay attention to political discourse since those in power often have a great impact on the identity of the country and the direction in which it develops (Wodak and Meyer 2009: 9, van Dijk 2000: 94). Even the expression “City on a hill” has been used by many politicians such as John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama.

To further signal the importance of political speeches, one need to only open YouTube or any other streaming service, where people may watch whole debates, speeches and constructed highlight reels or commentary videos of the above-mentioned discourses. As of October 2021, Donald Trump’s State of the Union address of 2020 has been viewed over 1,5 million times on CNN’s YouTube channel. While CNN certainly is not particularly popular among Trump’s voter base, the same speech has over 4,1 million views on Fox News channel. These do not even include the views seen elsewhere or those that watched it live. Furthermore, different analysis and commentaries as well as highlight videos of that same speech have been watched tens of millions of times. (Youtube.com, accessed 14 Oct. 2021). With numbers like these, there is no doubt that this particular speech has had some influence on the public, and thus the speech should be analyzed for its content and possible impact.

## 4 Data and Methods

### 4.1 Data

In this study I analyze four State of The Union addresses by both President Barack Obama and President Donald Trump. Though Obama has made the speech eight times, I included only the first four. I use both quantitative and qualitative methods in the analysis and thus the number of speeches must be equal for fair comparison. The reason behind choosing the first four and not the latter is that Obama was running for second term after the first. Trump also campaigned for another term though evidently, he was not elected. Thus, I consider the possibility that the tone of the speeches might be different when there is a campaigning aspect included compared to a situation where a subsequent term no longer was possible.

The research material consists of four speeches by both presidents. The speeches are “The State of the Union” (henceforth SOTU) addresses given to the United States Congress. I compiled a corpus from these four speeches. The individual length of speech varies between 5,017 words and 7,028 words. Altogether the corpus consists of 50,050 words and includes 5,187 different word types.

	Obama 2009	Obama 2010	Obama 2011	Obama 2012	Trump 2017	Trump 2018	Trump 2019	Trump 2020
Word count	6072	7249	6884	7028	5017	5860	5644	6296

Table 1. Composition of the corpus.

SOTU is a message to the congress by the president mandated in the US Constitution Article II, Section 3. It states that: ”He [the president] shall from time to time give to the Congress information of the state of the union, and recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.”. The first president of the US, George Washington, clarified that “from time to time” shall mean annually, and SOTU has with few exceptions been delivered annually since 1970. However, both Obama and

Trump addressed the congress in an “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress”. Peters & Woolley at The American Presidency Project explain that while these messages are technically not SOTU they probably can be counted as such while doing research. They argue that the impact of those speeches on the public, the media and the congress is similar to a SOTU (Peters & Woolley).

The speeches can be found at The American Presidency Project’s website that has archived speeches starting from Washington 1790. I analyze every SOTU address by Donald Trump and every address of Obama’s from his first presidential term. As noted earlier, the first speech of both presidents was technically not SOTU but as Peters & Woolley suggest, I will count them as such.

The speech is nowadays usually held in late January or early February, though before 1930s it was common to have it at the end of the year. The president also has a right to deliver the speech immediately before leaving the office at the end of his term in January, though many, including no president since Jimmy Carter, have chosen not to. In contrast, the new president will not have been in office for long before delivering his first SOTU, which is probably the reason why many have given a speech that is technically not a SOTU such as both Obama and Trump did (Peters & Woolley).

The reason I included only Obama’s first term speeches is that both Obama and Trump in during their respective first terms were also campaigning for a second term. I would argue that SOTU address during the first term, especially the last one, can thus be seen as a campaign speech as well. When only one of those presidents got elected the second time, it could skew the results if the newest speeches from Obama were included. After all, without the campaign aspect the tone of the last speech might be different.

More importantly, the number of speeches must be the same in order to be able to do fair comparison. In my thesis I focus on the number of keywords found in the speeches. If one president had twice the number of speeches, the results would be skewed, hence the limitation.

## 4.2 Method

The method of the analysis used in this paper is Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies (henceforth CADS). Partington et al. (2013: 5,10) define corpus linguistics as studies into the form and/or function of language which use corpora in their analyses. CADS is a subset of corpus linguistics that studies the form and/or function of language as communicative discourse incorporating corpora in the analyses.

Baker et al. (2008: 274) say that sometimes it is useful to not consider CDA and corpus linguistics as different methodologies. In fact, they can be complementary methods working in synergy, hence the term corpus assisted discourse studies (see Partington 2013).

Importantly, CADS is not tied to any particular type of discourse analysis (Partington et al. 2013: 10). CADS must therefore be separated from CDA because there is not political agenda present in CADS. According to Partington et. al., CADS and CDA have “very different attitudes to and traditions of how language data should be managed” (2013: 10). As Jeffries & Walker (2012: 214) argue the data does not need to be seen ideologically. However, as Wodak et al. (2009: 8) point out, CDA does not even pretend to assume an objective stance but rather works towards unmasking social injustices. Indeed, these traditions seem different to corpus assisted language analysis. Hence, Jeffries & Walker (2012: 214) argue that CDA often takes political stance where researchers ideas of injustice color the analysis. According to them, there are better non-political ways to unmask the non-obvious meanings from the discourse.

The aim of CADS is to uncover the non-obvious meaning in the discourse. This means that a discourse might carry meaning that is not obvious to the naked eye. A numerical analysis might reveal something inside a text that is not obvious on the surface (Partington et al. 2013: 11). CADS can reveal something that is not obvious to the reader but might also be, at least somewhat, opaque even to the author. The authors might be, and often are, unaware of all the meanings found in the text (ibid).

With a small, specialized corpora as in this study, some beneficial features of collocation tools may not be used. Information such as statistical significance is often left

unaddressed due to unreliability caused by too small frequencies for results to be reliable. Hence, there should be a larger material in order to be able to use all the collocation tools efficiently and reliably (*ibid.*). However, this is not always the case when the material needs to be small for other purposes such as when using a specialized corpus. Compiling a small, specialized corpus needs to be done with the knowledge of the limitations of lack of material to the data gathering (Baker et al. 2008: 277). Then, the analyst must decide which corpus-based processes are applied and how to consider the statistical significance points of the material.

Corpus linguistic tools, nevertheless, offer the researcher tools to attain reasonably high objectivity (Baker et al. 2008: 277). With the help of corpus linguistics, the researcher is able to approach the text without any preexisting notions about the content of the text. With corpus-assisted processes, the researcher may more easily spot wider themes and patterns in the text that might go unnoticed when manually going through the material (*ibid.*).

Though collocation tools might offer insight of implicitly conveyed messages of the text, concordance analysis offer tools to analyze the keywords directly in their context. Therefore, concordance analysis seems to be the only corpus linguistic tool that discourse analyst feel comfortable using (Baker et al. 2008, 278 – 279). Concordance analysis gives the analyst the immediate co-text of the keyword which then helps to interpret the text more objectively and limit the interpretation to “what is contextually appropriate or plausible” (Brown & Yule 1982: 59, cited in Baker et al. 2008: 279).

Furthermore, concordance analysis allows the researcher to quantify and group the concordance lines in relation to a specific keyword in order to identify patterns (Baker et al. 2008: 279). Looking only at collocate lists does not tell anything about the context, for which reason the researcher also needs to look at the concordances, which show the text surrounding the collocate. Mautner (2007: 59 – 60) points out that qualitative searches provide promising entry points to the data. With concordances one can more reliably scrutinize large text material. Mautner argues that corpus-assisted methods provide a good prelude to qualitative analysis (*ibid.*).



With CADS, one can draw use of concordance lines by using corpus tools to search for keywords and study the immediate co-text of the concordance with methods of critical discourse analysis.

### 4.3 Process of Analysis

In my analysis I used AntConc (Anthony 2020), which is a free corpus analysis toolkit for text analysis. AntConc is freely downloadable at [laurenceanthony.net](http://laurenceanthony.net).

There are two foci in this study. Firstly, an analysis of concordance lines of the phrase “*America is*” and analysis of how Obama and Trump talk about their country. This phrase sheds some light on what kind of national identity they assign to the country. I categorize the items based on the context and analyze whether there are similarities or not between the presidents. When using the query “America”, one gets several types of results. Those include instances like *America is*, *in America* and *America’s*. For the purpose of this paper results were filtered to include only *America is* to illustrate what kind of national identity is placed upon the country via discourse analysis.

Similar results might be found by using the query: *we are* as with *America is*. According to Billig (2010: 97 – 99) the name of the nation in these kinds of contexts is often left unsaid. It is redundant since the listeners already know which country the speaker is talking about and thus deictic expressions such as “the country” or “we” are enough. Pronouns like “we” can be used to signal belonging to the in-group. However, it is not always concrete enough since “we” can refer to many different groups. It may mean the nation, the party, the administration, the reasonable people and/or any combination of them (ibid.). That is why this is not included in this study though it could also bring some interesting results.

Additionally, I conduct a collocate analysis of “*America\**”. However, in this part I only manually choose lexical collocates and specify those that refer to work and/or economy. As the material is not large, I will count any lexical collocate that has a frequency of equal or above three. I also sort the collocates based on frequency rather than any other sorting method due to the small size of the source material.

The window span used in the analysis is from 5 words the left to 5 words the right. I chose to include 5 words because the size of the material is limited, and because I only am looking for words that appear close to the keyword and not analyzing structural features. This study focuses on the collocates that relate to work and economy. This is due to Trump coming into presidency outside of politics and from business world. Thus, one could imagine Trump highlighting economy. Also, during Obama's first term there was a global financial crisis because of the bursting of the American housing bubble. This in turn might have also highlighted the importance of economy. Furthermore, the US is a place where economy is central to the identity of the country, and the meaning of the American dream is globally known as building success out of nothing with only hard work and dedication.

## 5 Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Concordance Analysis of “America is”

Firstly, I analyzed instances of the phrase “America is” in context. I counted the number of the instances this phrase was used in the speeches and categorized them based on what types of attributes the speaker assigns to America.

As seen in Table 2. Obama used the phrase “America is” in total 7 times, and all but one were in the 2012 speech. Trump however, uttered the phrase 19 times of which one instance is not relevant to this study. In this individual item the complete phrase was “everyone in America is grieving for you”, and it was addressed to certain members of the audience and hence is omitted from other tables and analysis.

	Obama 2009	Obama 2010	Obama 2011	Obama 2012	Trump 2017	Trump 2018	Trump 2019	Trump 2020
<u>America</u> <u>is</u>	=	=	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1 (2)</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>7</u>

Table 2. Instances of *America is*.

In Tables 3 and 4 I have divided all instances of “America is” found in the speeches into categories. The categorization is based on which aspects of national identity are emphasized in each case. The categories found were American exceptionalism, Strength & power, Productivity & progress and Making allies. Below in Table 3, I have categorized Obama’s instances and Trump’s instances in Table 4.

Obama’s instances were mostly referencing to strength and power as seen in table 3. There is only one reference to American exceptionalism and Productivity. The 2011 example from Obama could be grouped into productivity & progress. However, it does appear to be more of reminiscing which is why I consider it more of a description of the exceptionalism of America and American businesses as Obama continues.

Category	Context	Year
Exceptionalism	<b>America is</b> the nation that built the transcontinental railroad, brought electricity to rural communities [...] projects didn't just come from laying down track or pavement. They came from businesses [...]	2011
Strenght & Power	We've made it clear that <b>America is</b> a Pacific power [...]	2012
	[...] hire veterans as cops and firefighters, so that <b>America is</b> as strong as those who defend her.	2012
	[...]blows we've dealt to our enemies to the enduring power of our moral example, <b>America is</b> back.	2012
	Let there be no doubt: <b>America is</b> determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon [...]	2012
Productivity & progress	[...] anyone who tells you that <b>America is</b> in decline or that our influence has waned, doesn't know what they're talking about.	2012
	[...] to do business in places like China. Meanwhile, <b>America is</b> more productive.	2012

Table 3. Concordance of *America is* by Obama

In terms of instances, Obama's 2012 speech seems to stand out from the rest of them. One could speculate that it is due to 2012 being election year, and Obama campaigning for a second term. Generally, Americans have been rather patriotic throughout history. Mentioning "America" could therefore, stimulate that patriotism in listeners. The instances were also almost all in relation to strength and power which could in turn be a signal to any hesitating voters and Republicans that America is strong and powerful even under Democratic leadership. The one example not categorized as strength and power in 2012 does imply America being a productive country. This, yet again, is always an important theme of any presidential campaign especially in America.

Category	Context	Year
Making allies	But we know that <b>America is</b> better off when there is less conflict, not more.	2017
	We want peace, wherever peace can be found. <b>America is</b> friends today with former enemies	2017
	<b>America is</b> willing to find new friends and to forge new partnerships where shared interests align	2017

Strenght & power	All the nations of the world friend or foe will find that <b>America is strong</b> , [...]	2017
	[...] <b>America is proud</b> , and [...]	2017
	[...] <b>America is free</b> [...]	2017
	Our allies will find that <b>America is</b> once again ready to lead.	2017
	Now is the time for Congress to show the world that <b>America is</b> committed to ending illegal immigration	2019
Exceptionalism ...	economy is the envy of the world, our military is the most powerful on Earth, by far, and <b>America is</b> again winning each and every day.	2019
	<b>America is</b> a land of heroes. This is a place where greatness is born [...]	2020
	The fact is that everybody wants to be where the action is, and the United States of <b>America is</b> indeed the place where the action is.	2020
	<b>America is</b> the place where anything can happen.	2020
	<b>America is</b> the place where anyone can rise.	2020
Productivity & progress	[...] it is also time to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure. <b>America is</b> a nation of builders [...]	2018
	[...] reenter society as productive, law-abiding citizens. Now States across the country are following our lead. <b>America is</b> a nation that believes in redemption. *	2019
	[...] we know that <b>America is</b> constantly achieving new medical breakthroughs [...]	2020
	With the tremendous progress we have made over the past 3 years, <b>America is</b> now energy independent [...]	2020
	[...] the first woman on the Moon will be American astronauts, using this as a launching pad to ensure that <b>America is</b> the first nation to plant its flag on Mars [...]	2020
*This is a rather opaque expression. I categorize this as productivity and progress, because it represents giving another chance for a productive life.		

Table 4. Concordance of *America is* by Trump

When comparing the two presidents' speeches, Trump's instances of "America is" were more mixed as seen in Table 4. In 2017, three of the seven items show attributes of peacemaking or making allies. The rest are categorized as Strength & power. Three of those four were actually in the same sentence "*All the nations of the world friend or foe will find that America is strong, America is proud, and America is free.*" Even if these were not coupled together, I would categorize them in the same manner because of the context. "*America is strong*" belongs rather clearly in this category. "*America is proud*" in the context of referring to friends and foes does imply that America has strength and

courage to stand tall before anyone. “*America is free*” also implies that they are strong enough not to be anyone’s puppet. Also, the last example of 2017 clearly tells the allies of the country that America is strong enough to be the leader.

In mainstream press Trump got a reputation of being divisive due to comments relating to Mexicans and other countries, since his strongest message always was to put America first. However, his first SOTU does not correlate with this image. In 2017 he seemed eager to signal his willingness and ability to forge new relations and make friends with former enemies. Perhaps this reminds of the sometimes-forgotten aspect of Trump’s campaign, when he stated he wanted to end wars in the Middle East and pull the American troops back home.

In 2020 he referred more to productivity and progress (3/7) Also, he often referred America as “the place” where anything is possible, and where anyone can rise. Trump also referred to strength and power but that was not significantly focused on. In a way, describing America as “the place” can also be interpreted to show productivity and progress at least on an individual level.

Interestingly, Trump’s instances of “*America is*” seem to change vastly from the first year to the last. While in 2017 he talked about making new allies and being a strong leader for the world, there are not any such references in 2020. In 2020 however, he seems to focus on the American exceptionalism and Productivity & progress. This is interesting since Trump did come into politics from the business world. Early in his term he seems to show his ability to make new partners and be a leader. Year 2020 on the other hand was a campaign year for him, and thus he seems to underline the importance of economy – a primary reason he was elected in the first place.

This quantitative search shows that Trump has attributed some qualities to America more often than his predecessor. Significantly, Trump’s attributes refer mostly to peacemaking and productivity, whereas Obama was more concerned about America’s strength.

Furthermore, one can also speculate with the frequency of the phrase. During his presidential campaigning, Trump had the slogan “Make America Great Again” (or MAGA). Even after getting elected, he used that and similar utterances as his slogan,

even until and during his second campaign. Therefore, one could assume that he would want to repeat even the name of the country more often. This effect also increased the collocates of “America\*” (see section 5.2.) since the more often a person repeats a word the more collocates that word has.

## 5.2 Collocate Analysis of “America\*”

What I was mostly interested in was collocates of America\* in relation to work and economy. This is due to Trump coming into presidency outside of politics and from business world. Also, Obama started his first term during a global financial crisis, which further highlights the theme of economy.

Total number of collocate tokens in all the Obama’s speeches was 1,646, while there were 528 different collocate types. Trump’s numbers were higher with 2,002 tokens with 687 different types. The frequency of ”America\*” was 276 for Obama and 334 for Trump. This is rather significant since Trump referred to America circa 20 % more often while having shorter speeches. Trump’s speeches were between 5,017 and 6,296 words while Obama’s were from 6,072 to 7,249 words. In total Trump’s addresses consist of 23,139 words and Obama’s of 27,853 words. The standardized frequency for ”America\*” for Trump was 14.43 per 1,000 words while that of Obama’s was 9.91 per 1,000 words. Hence, we can see Trump referring to America more often than Obama did. The number of hits for ”America\*” was higher, the number of collocate tokens was higher, and the number of collocate types was higher. Also, Trump’s speeches on average were significantly shorter.

Obama		Trump	
Frequency	Collocate	Frequency	Collocate
14	Jobs	12	workers
11	work	10	working
7	working	9	jobs
7	workers	9	african
6	tax	8	unemployment
6	innovation	7	hispanic
5	manufacturing	6	companies
5	economy	6	asian
5	businesses	5	dream

4	wealthiest	4	work
4	taxes	4	tax
4	success	4	property
4	skills	4	intellectual
4	insurance	3	trade
3	products	3	taxpayers
3	dream	3	labor
3	business	3	grit
		3	hands
		3	dollars
		3	buy

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Table 5. Lexical collocates referring to work and economy.

In Table 5. one can see all lexical collocates of ‘America\*’ in relation to work and economy. I have included “dream” as work and economy item because it refers to the American Dream in the speeches, which by nature signifies working hard. Trump lists some ethnicities, but I have included those since almost every one of the tokens referred to the groups employment rate.

The instances of “insurance” are all connected to health insurances. However, in the United States health insurances are often covered by the employer. Also, they are directly tied to economy. Also, “intellectual” here is directly tied to intellectual property in every instance, which then is tied to economy.

The results offer similar tokens for both presidents’ speeches. This is probably largely due to the small sample size. However, there seems to be few small differences. Trump had a slightly larger vocabulary in regard to work and economy for tokens with frequency of at least 3. He used 21 different words while Obama used 18.

While it was expected that “jobs” and “work\*” are on top of both presidents’ lists, there are still some clear differences. “Tax” and “taxes” were used 8 times by Obama but only half of that by Trump. Also, Obama mentioned “wealthiest” while Trump did not. This could indicate difference between the parties, since Democrats are more left leaning than Republicans. To further illustrate this distinction, Trump used the words “intellectual”, “property” and “trade” not mentioned by Obama.



However, there are other types of differences still. Almost every big city in the United States are in Democratic control and thus important districts for any Democratic politician. Also, many big companies and wealthy investors operate on Democrat-controlled areas. Therefore, it is no wonder that Obama used business related words like “business” or “businesses”, “innovation”, “manufacturing” and “success”. Trump, on the other hand, seems to have a completely different audience. While there certainly are some instances referring to traditional Republican talking points, he also seems to talk to the regular workers of America. Trump uses words like “unemployment”, “taxpayer”, “labor”, “hands” and “grit”. Also, as mentioned already, he refers to different ethnic groups and talks about their employment rate. Furthermore, Trump mentioned the word “workers” significantly more often (12 instances compared to 7 instances by Obama).

## 6 Conclusion

In my thesis I aimed to find out what kind of attributes presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump assign to America by looking at the concordance lines of "America is" in four of their SOTU addresses. I also looked at the collocates of "America\*" that relate to work and economy. This was done in order to find out whether they emphasize different aspects of the economy and if these findings reveal anything about their target audience.

The results for concordance analysis for "America is" show that Trump used the phrase significantly more often than Obama. Obama only used the phrase seven times while Trump did so 19 times, one instance of which was left out of this study. Interestingly, all but one of Obama's instances were in 2012, which may be explained by 2012 being the election year. For Obama, the instances almost exclusively referred to America's strength and power.

Trump's instances were more varied in nature. As Obama, Trump also referred to America's strength and power several times. However, Trump also emphasized America's willingness to make friends of old enemies and find new allies, which Obama did not. Trump also emphasized the American exceptionalism and progress and productivity more often, perhaps due to his business background. What is curious with Trump's items was that there is a clear shift from the beginning of his term towards the end. The beginning was mostly forging new allies while boasting about strength. In the last speech, however, he emphasized the American exceptionalism and productivity and progress, which again might be due to him coming into politics from business background and telling his audience on an election year that he has accomplished economic victories during his term.

The difference between the amount of items for "America is" as well as tokens for "America\*" might be explained by Trump's campaign slogan "Make America Great Again". Thus, every time he utters "America" there is a slight reference to his slogan as well as a possibility to invoke patriotic feelings in his audience.

As I already mentioned, the sample size is rather small and thus no conclusive results cannot be drawn. However, the words used by Obama seem to be meant for more white-

collar workers and people in management positions. There are mentions of taxes, manufacturing, businesses, success, and skills. Trump on the other hand seems to talk to the working class.

Trump emphasized workers over working, unemployment, and taxpayer. There is also a difference in tone with words like businesses and companies. Business seems more of a word used by those creating the businesses and “making money” while company is more general word that can describe a workplace.

The results go hand in hand with the general opinion of at least Donald Trump. During his campaign, there was talk of him trying to win the working class. While his rhetoric was also criticized, it was still largely meant for the workers of America. Obama, however, represented a party that was strongly in hold of the big cities, where most of the businesses are. This is not to say that Democrats are the party of the rich, but to highlight Trump speaking to the “forgotten” workers of the middle America.

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