

## IDIOSYNCRASIES OF TRUMP'S AMBIVALENCE

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**Ovsyannikova, V.V., Ovsyannikov, V.V. Idiosyncrasies of Trump's ambivalence.** The article considers psychological ambivalence in terms of its specific set-up as seen through the idiosyncrasies of speech that are revealing the personality of the 45<sup>th</sup> American President Donald Trump. The national survey of Americans reveals that attitudes towards Trump appear to be chiefly driven by his personality and not by his policy or his ideology. The article claims that Donald Trump's personality seems to be presented unfair in the mainstream English language mass media. "The New York Times", "The Washington Post", the BBC, the Euro news and the other "quality" sources of information have turned Trump into the most unpresidential President of the USA. There is plenty of talk about his narcissism, reward-seeking behavior, sexual harassment, misogyny, untrustworthiness etc. All of these are important features of a personality, but seem to be open to discussion. Trump is being demonized in the English language discourse quite in accordance with the prevailing idea of the news-makers: to look for scandal (skeletons in the cupboard). Narcissism, social dominance, misogyny and reward-seeking behavior do not make Trump unique as well as der innere Schweinehund. His personality is much more complicated and humane. Nevertheless, we regard the English mainstream media as the important jumping-off grounds for the impassionate assessment of Trump's personality. Trump is cognizant of role-playing and his language ambivalence is a reliable means to disguise himself while waiting patiently in an ambush.

Linguistically, ambivalence comes up in anadiplosis, jokes, exclamatory marks and other numerous means of ambiguity causing surprise in the recipient. Notoriously, Trump is ingenuous in using his tweets to convey his personality rather than his true intention.

**Keywords:** ambivalence, cognitive dissonance, narcissism, leadership, role-play, deviant behavior, stroking

**Овсяннікова В.В., Овсянніков В.В. Ідіосинкразії амбівалентності Трампа.** У статті розглянуто психологічну амбівалентність з позицій її специфічної організації, як вона бачиться у речових ідіосинкразіях, що дозволяють краще зрозуміти особистість 45-го президента США Дональда Трампа. Національний огляд свідчить, що на відношення виборців до Трампа впливає не стільки його політика та ідеологія, скільки його особистість. Якісні носії інформації ("The New York Times", "The Washington Post", the BBC, the Euro news та інші) будують та розповсюджують у цілому негативну оцінку найбільш «непрезидентського президента» Сполучених Штатів. Тому саме ми вважаємо англомовний медійний дискурс тільки надійною стартовою позицією. Поряд з іншими категоріями, якими характеризують особистість Трампа, виникає категорія амбівалентності. Саме вона уявляється найбільш відразливою психологічною рисою Трампа, що приймає різноманітні стилістичні засоби втілення їх в його висловлюваннях.

**Ключові слова:** амбівалентність, когнітивний дисонанс, нарцизм, лідерство, рольова гра, девіантна поведінка, погляджування.

**The aim** of the article is to give a dispassionate and analytical description of Trump's personality, drawing upon some of the most important ideas and research findings in psychological science.

**The main thesis** illustrated here is that Trump's personality is being demonized in the mainstream English language discourse: it is much more human and comprehensible though it is certainly dominated by ambivalence that finds most amazing stylistic manifestations in his messages. Trump's ambivalence must be put against the backdrop of leadership, success, courage and the inescapable part of a businessman personality: to make a deal and get things done.

**Preliminaries.** The great Freud was right in suggesting that to understand one's personality one must look into his childhood.

Trump grew up in a family of five kids and loving parents. He learnt early from his father that one may extend love to one's family and feel suspicion to the outside world. Trump's father was a successful businessman who raised Trump to know that the world is ruthless and to survive in it one must be a "killer" (in his Dad's definition). Trump boasted of having beaten his teacher of music. It must be true because his personality suggests a unique blend of compassion and aggression. Trump was deeply attached to his brother Fred. Fred had indulged in drinking that caused Fred's untimely death. The tragedy of losing Fred resulted in Trump's being an abstinent.

All people are endowed with a personality, but only great personalities remain in the history of mankind due to the works of writers and scholars who made a shot at analyzing them with the rigor of a

scientist or the passion of an artist. There are works in which rigor and passion combine. One of the famous cases is Stefan Zweig, who skillfully reconstituted the character of Mary Stuart, the Queen of Scots, Queen of France and a claimant to the throne of England, who was condemned for treason and executed at the age of forty-four as a potential threat to the stability of the English Crown by her cousin Elizabeth I, Queen of England.

This article follows the traditions of a scholarly description of a personality: we rely more on rigor than passion.

### **The theoretical background**

1. The closest tradition for the framework of the article is Karl Leonhard with his book “Akzentuierte Persönlichkeiten” in which the author gathers his observations under the umbrella of the generalizing term “accentuated” (akzentuierte) [6]. In all he does Trump displays an extraordinary deviation from the norm that sometimes takes up the form of what psychology terms “a deviant behavior”. And we attribute to it not only physical violence used to his teacher of music, but his scandalous admission of sexual harassment when he “*moves on women*” whom one must simply “*grab by the pussy*”.

2. While “akzentuierte” is ingenuously used by Leonhard, there is quite an option of generalizing terms for the description of a personality among which many are mentioned in passing, such as “ambivalence” [3]. It is in this category that we find an important intercrossing of psychology and linguistics as well as the generalizing term for analyzing Trump’s personality.

3. Ambivalence is an inalienable part of communication: “Words are fluid, and can mean different things in different circumstances. We give them a meaning only on the fly, in the context of the current conversation or text” [8]. So, Steven Pinker is important to us because he delves into “The Stuff of Thought” through our use of the language.

4. Many people are unhappy with the moral code imposed upon humanity by St. Augustine through his interpretation of the Bible and can’t help breaking it. Sallie Tisdale’s book “Talk Dirty to Me” is important to us because Trump turns out to have plenty of company rebelling against mores imposed on us [9]. Tisdale’s inordinately sincere story makes Trump’s personality much more human and comprehensible.

5. The basic dimensions of Personality are taken from Dan P. McAdams because the personality under scrutiny in this paper is Trump (McAdams’s work has the title “The mind of Donald Trump”):

*Extroversion*: gregariousness, social dominance, enthusiasm, reward-seeking behavior

*Neuroticism*: anxiety, emotional instability, depressive tendencies, negative emotions

*Conscientiousness*: industriousness, discipline, rule abidance, organization

*Agreeableness*: warmth, care for others, altruism, compassion, modesty

*Openness*: curiosity, unconventionality, imagination, receptivity to new ideas

[7]

6. The interdisciplinary approach postulated here is related to Marvin Minsky who made a great research in the study of the subconscious censors in humor. Embracing achievements of psychology, cognitology and linguistics. Marvin Minsky has contributed to the theory of Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, who understood the psychological impact of the joke as the manifestation of the subconscious desire to overcome “mental censors”. Trump’s mental censors have a great deal to do with his personality. He will never joke about motherhood, kids, physical suffering. The 2d Amendment or the American Dream [2].

7. Eric Berne’s seminal book may contribute to the analysis of Trump’s personality as a theoretical back-up to the belief that we enter the world prepared to perform roles and Trump seems supremely cognizant of the fact that he is always acting. What Trump sometimes is badly missing is “stroking” - a very important factor in the communicative play that does not exist without it [4].

8. Gender plays a significant part in Trump’s personality. Otto Weininger’s book may be a controversial piece, but the importance he attaches to the interaction of gender in the molding of a personality is irrefutable [1].

9. Scandal is known to be the main driving force behind the news discourse that seeks to expose skeletons in the cupboard of a famous personality. The important thing is that skeletons must not be treated as “The Truth” – they are useful as the background to the story [5].

Leonhard uses the psychological commentary of the authors of fiction as valuable material for the theory. We share his idea that, in fact, all great authors are great psychologists. However, unlike the

second part of his book that contains a rich stock of examples from famous writers, we rely on the observations made by journalists: they may not be as famous, but it is their job to reach out into the intricacies of the mind-set and psycho-type of the most important man of the most influential country.

We make allowances, certainly, that the rules of the communicative game in mass media are much more imposing and obligatory than those functioning in fiction. Nevertheless, it is compensated for by the relentless pursuit of scandal exposing the personality of the movers and shakers.

That's why the incumbent French President's wife takes such a heavy toll of our time: she is scandalously older than he is. Rather than discuss the tedious details of the French involvement in the punishment of Assad for his alleged use of chemical weapons against the civilian population, the press is anxious to arouse the readers' imagination by the extraordinary difference in age between the marital partners.

### **The methodological approach**

It is that of a psychologist who tries to find clues to the personality in the stylistic arrangement of his speech as well as the signals delivered by his body language and other means of communication (his actions) that lie outside linguistics as they are shown by the English language discourse. Trump is a prolific writer ("The Art of the Deal" is the most well-known), but we tell the story as it is seen in the English language mass media.

### **The personality of Donald Trump in the English language discourse.**

The most prominent features:

#### **1. Weird**

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/06/the-mind-of-donald-trump/480771/>

#### **2. A liar**

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/incompetent-strong-egotistical-words-people-describe-trump/story?id=50178088>

#### **3. Incompetent**

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/incompetent-strong-egotistical-words-people-describe-trump/story?id=50178088>

#### **4. Idiot, incompetent, leader, liar**

<http://time.com/4774598/words-associated-donald-trump-quinnipiac-poll/>

**5. Enthymematic** <http://www.americanews.com/story/politics/2016/02/16/donald-trumps-rhetorical-style>

*All of the above mentioned epithets are related to the concept of "personality".*

*There is a general summing up of a scholar as well:*

"Trump's personality is certainly **extreme** by any standard, and particularly rare for a presidential candidate" [7 – the bold type is ours].

What makes Trump the most unpresidential President of the USA? Unlikeability? Reward-seeking behavior? Social dominance? Mysogyny (a specific form of social dominance? Untrustworthiness? All of these are important, but seem to be open to discussion.

One of the reliable sources into Trump's personality is his language idiosyncrasies [10]. They send signals of the Man in Power. These signals are related to his personality that may mean such features as cognitive dissonance, egocentrism, flamboyance of a show-man, narcissism, a choleric temperament, misogynism, arrogance, intolerance, non-conformism (to the allies), conformism (to the Establishment).

Comparing Trump's psychological properties with his speech idiosyncrasies reveals the overwhelming presence of ambivalence in his personality.

**Ambivalence** as a psychological term is a state of having simultaneous conflicting reactions, beliefs, or feelings towards some object. Psychologically uncomfortable ambivalence is known as cognitive dissonance that results in avoidance, procrastination, or in deliberate attempts to resolve the ambivalence. People experience the greatest discomfort from their ambivalence at the time when the situation requires a decision to be made.

Trump seems to be torn apart by his desire to make a deal (that presupposes a trade-off) and desire to punish the recalcitrant opponent. The psychological input of it produces the linguistic output that carries more than one meaning. This is **linguistic ambivalence** that shows itself in different stylistic forms. Here are the main ones.

### **1. Trump's shout-outs**

Some of them are mere expressions of the extrovert ready to share his joy with other people:

*"So great to be in New York. Catching up on many things (remember, I am still running a major business while I campaign), and loving it!"*

Other shout-outs carry anger, admiration and other emotions. Some of them suggest cognitive dissonance as well as inability to find other forms of addressing the issue.

*"Get ready Russia, because they will be coming, nice and new and smart!"* Trump's tweet meant missiles that were to be launched to punish the President of Syria for his alleged use of chemical weapons against the civilian population. The linguistic arrangement of the message is extraordinary in many things:

1) the use of the Imperative in reference to the only country (Russia) that can compete with the USA in nuclear armaments;

2) the choice of epithets with negative evaluative connotations for the description of the most devastating killing machine;

3) the substitution of the target of the threat (Syria) for Russia that is implicitly called responsible for the chemical atrocities;

4) the use of the exclamatory mark that makes the message emotional rather than rational.

On the 2d of March in 2017 Philip Cowell published in "Culture" the article "What overusing exclamation marks says about you" which he starts with the following observation:

"According to the Trump Twitter Archive, in 2016 alone the @realDonaldTrump posted 2,251 tweets using exclamation marks. The 'alternative facts' are there for all to see: of 100 tweets I not-very-randomly picked, he used exclamation marks in all but 32 of them. That's a 68% likelihood of signing off a tweet with a shriek!"

<http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20170301-what-overusing-exclamation-marks-says-about-you?ocid=ww.social.link.twitter>

Some of Trump's shout-outs are indeed extraordinary and characterize his unique manner of flabbergasting the public in the barrack-like style of the sergeant talking down to the recruits (we wonder how Eric Berne would have characterized the role-play Trump is engaged here). This is a one-way-ticket direction in communication, diminishing, degrading and arrogant.

The article tells us that Trump was allowed to get away with more 'hysterical', 'female' traits during the election campaign, while his opponent – Hillary Clinton – was heavily criticized for not being 'female' enough: in effect, she didn't use enough exclamation marks.

On exclamation marks the Fowlers were typically definitive: 'The stop should be used, with one exception, only after real exclamations.' The 'real exclamations' they describe are roughly what we already know (interjections, expletives, commands, pronouncements of surprise); the exception they refer to is rather telling: for 'when the writer wishes to express his own incredulity or other feeling about what is not his own statement, but particularly a quotation from someone else.' This is, they continue, when the exclamation mark is 'a neat and concise sneer'.

The exclamation mark is certainly the mark of the internet: email, chat forums, social media and comment.

The exclamatory mark may have changed its initial linguistic function (the mark of admiration), especially under the influence of the internet, but when it is used as often as it is exercised by Trump, one wonders about most important decisions being made in a state of excitement and mental disarray.

Social dominance, enthusiasm and emotional instability – all of them contribute to the accentuated use of the exclamation mark, but while in some cases it can be the psychological signal sent by the extrovert to the outside world: "I am open-hearted and ready to embrace the whole world" in other cases there is a more ominous mark to it:

*"North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the 'Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times. Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!"*

The message seems to be quite clear, but profanity which looms behind metaphorical associations (his Button measured against the Button of Kim Jong Un) makes it ambivalent: was it an insult or a serious threat?

## **2. Swearing**

Trump doesn't mince about with words. Does it suggest an extrovert, or does it mean some other things?

In a meeting with Senators and House members on immigration, the President of the United States is reported saying, *"Why do we want all these people from 's---hole countries' coming here?"*  
<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/2018/01/12/trumps-s--hole-countries-remark-casts-remarkable-light-on-immigration-policies.html>

Mark Singer quotes the following piece of Trump's manner of interaction:

*"O.K., I guess I'm asking, do you consider yourself ideal company?"*

*"You really want to know what I consider ideal company?" Trump replied. "A total piece of ass."*

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/best-wishes-donald>

The use of the taboo unit may suggest different things: it may be an insult just as it may be a signal of I-like-you-pal familiarity. There is a taboo word as well as obscenity in the example below:

*I moved on her, actually. You know, she was down on Palm Beach. I moved on her, and I failed. I'll admit it. I did try and fuck her. She was married.*

Trump uses swear words to diminish women. He is not a gentleman and he is proud of it.

### **3. Appeal to the authority**

There aren't any quotes in Trump's speech except for one:

*'The Bible tells us, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity."*

Cognitive dissonance didn't escape the observer who takes notice of the us vs. them approach pointing to it by the term divisiveness:

*"This is ironic given Trump's notorious divisiveness! It is only the Bible he obviously considers worth of his mention, worth of exemplifying his own unreachable wisdom" [10].*

If the call for unity from the Bible is perceived as divisiveness it means, apparently that the appeal in Trump's allusion is obscure to the recipient. Again, linguistic ambivalence may point out to cognitive dissonance, as a manifestation of psychological ambivalence.

Appeal to the authority means much more than appeal to the authority: it means a claim to intellect.

The British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson quoted Dostoyevsky saying that the Salisbury incident was *"rather like the beginning of 'Crime and Punishment' in the sense that we are all confident of the culprit, and the only question is whether he will confess or be caught."* The Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova recalled another line from the novel: *"a hundred suspicions don't make a proof."*

A claim to the knowledge of Great Literature is not so frequent among the politicians, though some of them are educated enough to mention Dostoyevsky. The politician's frame of mind – noblesse oblige – makes him appeal to other politicians for authority. A typical case is illustrated by Hendrik Hertzberg in his enlightening article *"Obama's inaugural allusions"*:

*"Quotations are a common speechwriting crutch. This speech kept them to a minimum: the only direct quote it used was the "self-evident truths" line from the Declaration of Independence, which served as a unifying frame. But the speech was full of allusions, bringing a nice historical resonance to certain passages"*.

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/hendrik-hertzberg/obamas-inaugural-allusions>

Proverbs seem to be easier tools than the Declaration of Independence and classics. Thus, the appeal to authority was aptly delivered by Ronald Reagan through proverbs, as a phatic bow to his counterpart.

Trump, apparently, is not interested in poetry or classics though he is an author of many books himself. His neglect to allusions seems to suggest that His own self commands the parade. It is a claim to leadership which he invariably maintains.

### **4. Enthemes**

Trump is notoriously ambiguous in his remarks. It may be regarded as the usual communicative strategy of politicians providing them with the opportunity to disavow the statement they have just made by the conciliatory and defiant reference to inaccurate interpretation. However, ambiguities point out to the ambivalence of a personality that, as it is the case below, is driven in the direction of displaying a firm attachment to the ally, and at the same time is eager to poke fun at Macron.

Trump's get-together with Macron triggered off a lot of caustic comments and inspired the show of comedienne simulating the inordinate use of stroking used by both men. Here is how it seen by Trump:

"I mean, really. He's a very good person. And a tough guy, but look, he has to be. I think he is going to be a terrific president of France. But he does love holding my hand."

<https://www.thelocal.fr/20170720/trump-on-macron-he-loves-holding-my-hand>

*The New York Times* "has detected irony in Trump's description of Macron's body language:

**"He's a great guy — smart, strong, loves holding my hand. People don't realize, he loves holding my hand — that's good!"**

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/19/us/politics/trump-macron-holding-hands.html>

In the above mentioned examples attributing the epithets "tough" or "strong" to a man who loves holding hands with another man casts a doubt on Macron's toughness, age or sexual identity.

Trump's enthymematic speaking style has also caused problems for his campaign. During a Republican debate in 2015, Trump and moderator Megyn Kelly had a heated exchange. When Trump later commented on Kelly, his use of an enthymeme only made the situation worse.

"[Kelly had] blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her — whatever," Trump said, according to Reuters. That "whatever" was taken to mean Kelly was menstruating. Trump denied the misogynistic response — something easy to do when nothing was ever explicitly stated.

<http://www.americanews.com/story/politics/2016/02/16/donald-trumps-rhetorical-style>

#### Conclusions

1. Trump is a much more complicated personality than it is shown in the English language discourse. It is misleading and dangerous because the national survey of Americans reveals that attitudes towards Trump appear to be chiefly driven by his personality and not by his policy or his ideology.

2. Trump is being demonized in the English language discourse quite in accordance with the prevailing idea of the news-makers: to look for scandal (skeletons in the cupboard). Narcissism, social dominance, misogyny and reward-seeking behavior do not make him unique.

3. Trump is unique in the businessman's skill "to make a deal". Ambivalence is an important part of his armory.

4. Linguistically, ambivalence comes up in anadiplosis, pun, exclamatory marks, ambiguity etc.

5. Trump is ingenuous in using his tweets to convey his personality rather than his true intention.

6. The news-makers publish many articles about Trump's humiliating attitude towards women. If they had bothered to read Otto Weistinger or Sallie Tisdale, they would have made less ado about it.

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