



UNIVERSITY OF
PORTSMOUTH

post-truth

ADJECTIVE

Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief

Source: Oxford English Dictionary

‘POST-TRUTH’ AS A LEXICAL ITEM: FREQUENCY, DISTRIBUTION, AND CO-OCCURRENCE

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- Corpora and corpus linguistics
- Frequency of ‘post-truth’
- Geographic distribution
- Collocation (= what words are most frequently used with ‘post-truth’)
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ORIGINS

1. Occurring after or resulting from a disclosure of the truth. *rare*.

Categories »

1985 *Sunday Mail (Brisbane)* 1 Sept. 72/2 State Cabinet..went into post-truth trauma when it discovered the family company of the Minister for Two-Up and Other Means of Making a Quid had an application in for betting shop.

(Hide quotations)

2. orig. *U.S.* Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

Categories »

1992 *Nation (N.Y.)* 6 Jan. 13/1 Dictators up to now have had to work hard at suppressing the truth. We, by our actions, are saying that this is no longer necessary... We, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world.

2004 R. KEYES: Post-truth Era i. 15 In the post-truth era we don't just have truth and lies, but a third category of ambiguous statements that are not exactly the truth but fall short of a lie.

2012 *Guardian* 11 Sept. 36/3 The press is grappling with so-called post-truth politics, or the tendency among candidates in election year not just to twist the facts but to keep blatantly doing so even when they're caught.

2016 *Herald (Glasgow)* (Nexis) 17 Nov. 15 Social media..has become a post-truth nether world in which readers willingly participate in their own deception because it feels good.

CORPORA AND CORPUS LINGUISTICS



What is a corpus?

- *A corpus is a collection of pieces of language text in electronic form, selected according to external criteria to represent, as far as possible, a language or language variety as a source of data for linguistic research (Sinclair, 2004)*

Why is a corpus useful?








- *[L]anguage looks rather different when you look at a lot of it at once. Such evidence [as that made available by corpora] has not been available before. Linguists have had to rely on their intuitions, their limited capacity for thorough textual analysis, and whatever has caught their eye or ear [...] in their daily lives (Sinclair, 1991: 100)*






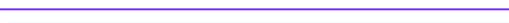
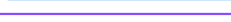


FREQUENCY OF 'POST-TRUTH': 1

2014-A	0	209.8	0.00	
2014-B	4	219.9	0.02	■
2015-A	2	223.8	0.01	■
2015-B	8	289.1	0.03	■
2016-A	19	684.5	0.03	■
2016-B	1,075	853.8	1.26	■
2017-A	1,055	863.6	1.22	■
2017-B	406	888.9	0.46	■
2018-A	93	306.3	0.30	■

Source: NOW (News on the Web) Corpus: <https://corpus.byu.edu/now/>

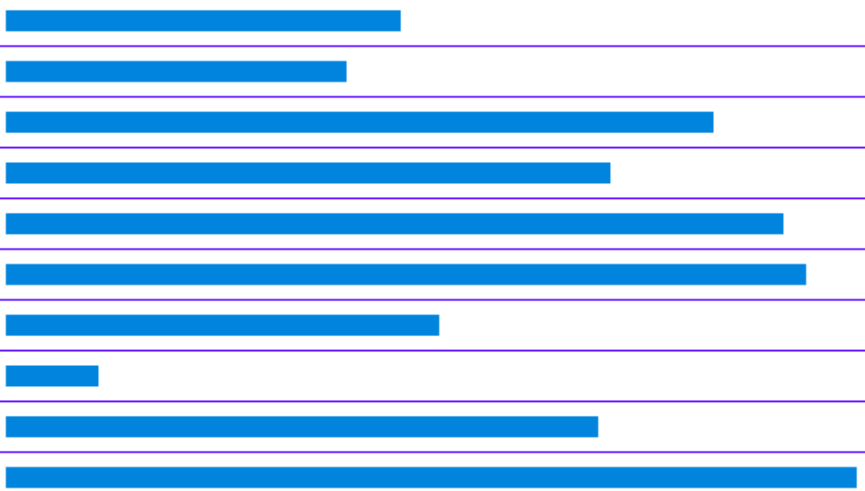
FREQUENCY OF 'POST-TRUTH': 2

16-Oct-21-31	12	48.2	0.25	
16-Nov-01-10	31	48.3	0.64	
16-Nov-11-20	376	43.9	8.56	
16-Nov-21-30	181	41.3	4.38	
16-Dec-01-10	100	45.5	2.20	
16-Dec-11-20	104	43.2	2.41	
16-Dec-21-31	180	43.2	4.17	

17-Jan-01-10	132	41.1	3.21	
17-Jan-11-20	94	43.8	2.14	
17-Jan-21-31	119	45.5	2.61	
17-Feb-01-10	57	46.3	1.23	
17-Feb-11-20	66	42.6	1.55	
17-Feb-21-29	74	37.6	1.97	
17-Mar-01-10	41	46.2	0.89	
17-Mar-11-20	37	44.8	0.83	
17-Mar-21-31	30	49.6	0.60	

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF 'POST-TRUTH'

- In terms of the English-speaking world, early uses tended to be more frequent in developed Western countries.
- However, things have evened up in the last couple of years:

United States	322	934.2	0.34	
Canada	230	772.7	0.30	
Great Britain	469	757.6	0.62	
Ireland	224	423.6	0.53	
Australia	302	443.9	0.68	
New Zealand	173	247.3	0.70	
India	241	635.3	0.38	
Sri Lanka	3	37.1	0.08	
Pakistan	84	162.2	0.52	
Bangladesh	18	24.2	0.74	

- Also: Kenya, 0.76 per mil; Tanzania, 0.0; Philippines, 0.69

Source: NOW (News on the Web) Corpus: <https://corpus.byu.edu/now/>

FREQUENCY OF 'POST-TRUTH': 'POST-' WORDS

1	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-MORTEM	18329	
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-SECONDARY	14707	
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-WAR	14496	
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-BREXIT	12899	
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-MATCH	12644	
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-TRAUMATIC	11711	
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-SEASON	11490	
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-ELECTION	9192	
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-MODERATED	8119	
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-GRADUATE	7374	
11	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-PRODUCTION	5794	
12	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-MODERATE	5008	
13	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-APOCALYPTIC	4888	
14	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-GAME	4699	
15	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-COLONIAL	3451	
16	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-APARTHEID	3328	
17	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-HARVEST	3220	
18	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-INDEPENDENCE	3215	
19	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-DOCTORAL	2840	
20	<input type="checkbox"/>	POST-TRUTH	2673	

'POST-TRUTH' IS NOT FULLY LEXICALIZED

- In approximately 40% of examples, 'post-truth' (or its containing phrase) is enclosed in quotation marks → use/mention distinction
- Many examples are concerned with defining 'post-truth' .

Examples

- Now, we have heard a lot recently about " **post-truth** " -- that is, lies.
- No speech is now complete without a reference to our " **post-truth** " times.
- All of this marks the advent of the so-called " **post-truth** " society.
- If we accept that we somehow are living in an age of " **post-truth** politics ", it stands to reason that...
- The increase in usage of " **post-truth** " saw the term eventually emerge ahead of the pack.
- " **Post-truth** " is defined convolutedly as " relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts..." "

'POST-TRUTH': COLLOCATIONS

post-truth (*noun*) Alternative PoS: [adjective](#) (24)
 Timestamped JSI web corpus 2014-2018 English freq = [9,450](#) (0.28 per million)

nouns and verbs modified by "post-truth"			"post-truth" and/or ...		
		38.84			2.23
post-west	21	7.54	post-fact	22	11.49
" Post-Truth , Post-West , Post-Order ?			post-west	21	11.42
politics +	1,013	5.15	" Post-Truth , Post-West , Post-Order ?		
of post-truth politics			disinformation	6	5.12
disinformation	7	5.04	propaganda	13	3.49
era +	800	4.80	the age of post-truth , propaganda , and suppression		
the post-truth era			era	12	1.19
world +	980	3.25	news	46	0.63
a post-truth world			of post-truth and fake news		
propaganda	15	2.03	world	37	0.35
the age of post-truth , propaganda , and suppression			truth	6	0.12
age +	184	1.85	fact	36	0.08
in a post-truth age					
presidency	22	1.77	prepositional phrases		
post-truth presidency			... of "post-truth"	127	1.34
phenomenon	22	1.14	... in "post-truth"	12	0.13
society +	169	0.95	"post-truth" as ...	12	0.13
in a post-truth society					
reality	27	0.44	"post-truth" is a ...		
post-truth reality					0.23
journalism	6	0.41	pre-fascism	7	12.95
discourse	5	0.35	word	15	3.68

'POST-TRUTH' vs 'FAKE NEWS': KEYWORDS

Rank	Freq	Keyness	Keyword
1	9388	11460.736	post
2	9262	11409.518	truth
3	1427	1665.670	politics
4	1653	1483.495	world
5	1411	1419.746	era
6	885	1047.236	word
7	698	902.868	oxford
8	4571	821.761	in
9	897	624.541	year
10	1586	580.860	we
11	367	480.218	dictionaries
12	464	355.289	age
13	277	350.125	dictionary
14	676	327.847	facts
15	265	296.125	living
16	4360	257.052	a
17	287	239.721	live
18	273	236.975	society
19	401	215.495	where
20	524	203.739	our
21	5325	156.704	of
22	131	143.450	english

Rank	Freq	Range	Cluster
1	275	1	we are
2	169	1	we live
3	136	1	we have
4	136	1	we're
5	62	1	we've
6	53	1	we can
7	44	1	we now
8	35	1	we need
9	28	1	we do
10	28	1	we should
11	24	1	we don
12	22	1	we may
13	21	1	we might
14	21	1	we must
15	19	1	we know
16	19	1	we want
17	15	1	we seem
18	14	1	we were
19	12	1	we all
20	11	1	we find
21	11	1	we really

'POST-TRUTH': we need to...

We need to argue against this in
we need to 595505302
s we need to avoid the ' <post-truth >'
we need to be ever mindful of
we need to come to 594099654
we need to 712543541 c
we need to demand honesty and integri
We need to embrace rather than run
t We need to move past the " <post-
We Need to Put Empathy First Research
we need to realize that the 60
we need to rediscover the urgency of
we need to see things from a
we need to show politicians and the
we need to stand well back and
we need to talk about monsters.
we need to understand the tools we
we need to understand what is
we need to update our

'FAKE NEWS' vs 'POST-TRUTH': KEYWORDS

Rank	Freq	Keyness	Keyword
1	9336	9668.490	fake
2	9807	9559.906	news
3	707	744.562	facebook
4	411	365.205	stories
5	323	328.426	spread
6	259	314.571	sites
7	971	292.402	media
8	348	282.742	story
9	257	269.801	cnn
10	1619	262.808	on
11	176	202.597	site
12	159	179.924	spreading
13	170	179.663	reports
14	750	158.829	he
15	118	155.510	network
16	160	154.045	google
17	4057	131.156	to
18	265	129.875	real
19	125	117.912	russian
20	89	108.481	websites
21	117	107.950	outlets
22	328	106.673	social

CONCLUSIONS

- From being almost unknown outside academia, ‘post-truth’ rose to prominence in late 2016, coinciding with Trump’s victory and the accolade from Oxford English Dictionaries
- It may already be declining in frequency, but is unlikely to return to pre-2016 levels
- From its beginnings in Western countries, its frequency is now spread evenly across the global English-speaking media
- It is not yet fully lexicalized in English, with the word being discussed almost as often as the idea behind it
- In media discourse, it is used mainly attributively, with *politics*, *world*, and *era* being overwhelmingly the most frequently qualified nouns
- ‘Post-truth’ seems to engage a ‘we’, who are ‘living in a post-truth world/era’, towards which we are urged to choose from a variety of different attitudes

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

- Sinclair, J. (1991). *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Sinclair, J. (2004). Corpus and text: basic principles. In Wynne, M. (Ed.) *Developing linguistic corpora: a guide to good practice*. AHDS: Literature, Languages, & Linguistics. Retrieved from: <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~martinw/dlc/chapter1.htm>