

**The Coventry, Play! Mystery — or, covfefe is really Cov, fefe! ‘Cov(entry), play!’**  
Richard D. Janda [co-editor of *The Handbook of Historical Linguistics* (2003 & 2005)]:

While *covfefe* in Donald Trump’s Wednesday morning (5/31/17) tweet was most probably a misspelling of *coverage*, that strange letter-string lends itself to alternative linguistic analysis. Linguists most often write about language structure and language change in non-tweeted texts, but trying to find humor in the chaos of the current administration can sometimes lead one to a different place.

*Cov* is used in British English as a clipped form of the city name *Coventry*. This is parallel to the clipping seen in U.S. place names like *Delmarva*, which includes the beginnings of *Del-aware* and *Mar-yland* (plus the first and last letters of *V-irgini-a*).

In Coventry, as in many other British cities, there are speakers of *Ewe* (usually rendered in English as *AY-way* or *AY-vay*), a language mainly spoken in the southwest of Ghana — now a sovereign nation, but once a British colony in West Africa. In Ewe, *fefe* is a form of the verb ‘to play’. (Ewe is a tonal language, but the tone markings are omitted here.)

Hence — IF we can entertain the barely conceivable thought that Trump might tweet bilingually — we can speculate as follows: *covfefe* = *Cov, fefe!* = ‘*Coventry, play!*’. But why *Coventry*, and why *play*?

Here, we can invoke Trump’s well-known trouble with geography (e.g., with *Belgium* and *the Middle East*). Also relevant is the fact that Coventry has a football/soccer team (*Coventry City*) — as does Manchester (which actually has more than one team).

Trump could have typed *Coventry* when he really meant to tweet about *Manchester* and the recent terrorist attack there. And he may well have misunderstood requests for people to *pray* that *Manchester Stand United* as references to the *playing* of *Manchester United*.

This enables us to solve the mystery of that now-famous *twump* — or *tweet* by *Trump*. Imagine him starting with *Manchester (United), play!*, substituting *Cov(entry)* for *Manchester*, replacing *play* with the Ewe form *fefe*, and then running it all together in lower-case letters. Thus, *voilà*: *covfefe*, with geographical confusion and language-mixing (or at least some yawning) tossed together in a single word-salad — priceless.

Plus, if anyone really believes this, then there’s a large tower in New York City that might actually be available for a special price....

Postscript: The facts about *Cov* and *fefe* are verifiable online via Wiktionary. There’s also an old (1968) Ewe language-course online; it’s out of date but does contain the verb-root *fé* ‘play’ (in the word-list on page F-1). Finally, *Coventry* in British English also means ‘banishment’, but that and the possible *twump* *covtwumtwum* are another story.