ARTICLE TITLE	INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY VS. REAL-TIME RESPONSE: DISCOURSE PATTERNS IN COVID-19 PRESS CONFERENCES
ARTICLE INFO	Tamta Goradze, Zeinab Gvarishvilii. (2025) Institutional Strategy vs. Real-Time Response: Discourse Patterns in Covid-19 Press Conferences. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*. 1(45). doi: 10.31435/ijitss.1(45).2025.3257
DOI	https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.1(45).2025.3257
RECEIVED	02 February 2025
ACCEPTED	15 March 2025
PUBLISHED	30 March 2025
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INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY VS. REAL-TIME RESPONSE: DISCOURSE PATTERNS IN COVID-19 PRESS CONFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a global crisis that had far-reaching consequences beyond public health. It disrupted every aspect of human life and global systems. Responsible persons on crisis management had to play a vital role in making decisions, allocating resources, enforcing policies, along with effective communication, which comprised disseminating accurate information, countering misinformation, and encouraging adherence to safety protocols.

Despite the prevalence of online communication and social media, global crises have demonstrated that news conferences are still the preferred technique of information dissemination. Press conferences are not chosen at random for political speeches, rather, they are valued for their procedural and general characteristics, particularly in situations of crisis, due to their interactive, dynamic, and collaborative nature. A press conference is a rhetorical response to an urgent situation, with three basic speech acts: introduction, defense of a position and addressing skepticism. These communication acts are carried out through a various strategic maneuver.

The study highlights the significance of press conferences in crisis situations and their role as a strategic communication tool. While press conferences undoubtedly serve institutional needs, the debate remains as to whether they represent intentional strategic communication or emergent responses based on situational factors. Strategic communication can range from intentional to emergent, depending on the context.

The research provides a corpus-based comparative and contrastive analysis of a limited number of COVID-19-related discourses from press conferences held by authorities in the USA. Thus, the study focuses on: i. determining the frequency and distribution of pre-selected markers based on a generic analysis of COVID-19-related discourse; ii. examining the pragmatic value of the markers and their intended impact on the audience; iii. comparing and contrasting the frequency and distribution of discourse markers in monologue and question-and-answer (Q&A) segments; iv. identifying the type of strategic communication present in COVID-19 press conferences.

The study contributes to a greater understanding of the press conference as a strategic communication tool, rather than as a random channel for information distribution. It explores how press conference functions as strategic communication, ranging from intentional to emergent, shaped by institutional responsibilities.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic posed an unprecedented global challenge, affecting multiple aspects of society beyond public health. At its core, the pandemic disrupted daily life, strained economics, and exposed vulnerabilities in global systems. Lockdowns and social distancing measures, essential to curbing the virus's spread, isolated communities, eroded mental health, and reshaped the way people worked, learned, and connected. It highlighted the urgent need for stronger healthcare infrastructure, social safety nets, and national or international cooperation to deal with the crisis. At the same time, misinformation and vaccine hesitancy deepened divisions within societies, undermining collective efforts to combat the virus.

In addition to their primary roles and responsibilities, government representatives tasked with crisis management hold critical duties such as leadership, strategic decision-making, resource allocation and mobilization, policy implementation and enforcement, as well as monitoring and evaluation. An essential component of their role is effective communication and the promotion of public awareness. This entails disseminating accurate, timely, and clear information, addressing misinformation through targeted campaigns and credible communication platforms, and fostering compliance with safety guidelines.

The global crises have demonstrated that press conferences remain a preferred method for the immediate dissemination of information, even as modern communication increasingly relies on online platforms, social media, and algorithms. It is regarded as one of the most adaptable mediums for achieving communication objectives, owing to its procedural and generic characteristics, such as interactivity, dynamism, and cooperativeness.

The primary objective of a press conference, as a tool of strategic communication, is to enhance public awareness and influence societal attitudes toward issues of collective interest. However, it is important to acknowledge that various stakeholders utilize press conferences to serve diverse purposes.

The press conference, a form of public communication orchestrated by governmental or state entities to address predefined topics within a structured role hierarchy, warrants analysis from both political science and journalism perspectives. Moreover, these events facilitate a confluence of social, linguistic, and rhetorical considerations. The verbal and linguistic conduct exhibited by key individuals reflects the unique characteristics and inherent urgency of the crisis under discussion. Undeniably, the press conference functions as a modality of strategic communication, serving institutional objectives. Nevertheless, the question of whether a given press conference represents the execution of a pre-planned strategic communication initiative, or the ad-hoc selection of a communicative strategy dictated by situational exigencies, remains a subject of ongoing debate.

Theoretical Underpinning

The definition of press conferences has been provided by various scholars, emphasizing the distinct pragmalinguistic features of its subgenres. The study encompasses multiple perspectives, including political science, journalism, sociolinguistics, linguistics, and rhetoric. Among the numerous definitions proposed, precedence is given to those emphasizing the political function of press conferences. Consequently, the press conference is primarily conceptualized as a communicative strategy serving institutional needs. Reinforcing this view, Kjeldsen (2003) argues that press conferences serve as a rhetorical response to urgent situations, addressing the need for disseminating critical information during periods of deficiency. This aligns with Bitzer's conceptualization of the press conference as a rhetorical response to a rhetorical situation, further solidifying the understanding of its reactive and communicative function in moments of crisis or institutional need.

A typical press conference can be likened to an advertisement, as the message remains entirely under the control of its creator, bypassing filtration by journalists and unaffected by their personal attitudes or beliefs in shaping audience interpretation. While journalists may initially appear to be the primary audience of a press conference, it can be argued that, in reality, the genuine and ultimate audience consists of the readers of newspapers and magazines, users of online platforms, and the listeners and viewers of radio and television broadcasts.

Vatz (1973) states that just as situations and genres influence the responses of rhetors, rhetors also have the power to frame, form, and constitute situations and genres. The rhetor's central task is "to discover and make use of proper constraints in his message in order that his response, in conjunction with other constraints operative in the situation, will influence the audience". In this context, the rhetorical actions of authorities during a press conference not only shape the nature and urgency of the crisis but also influence their own ethos. Given the points outlined above, it becomes challenging to determine whether the situation is primarily shaped by the speakers (politicians) or by the journalists. Regardless of the answer, a press conference ultimately represents a unified communicative channel that conveys rhetorical meaning and serves as an example of multimodality.

Ekström and Eriksson(2017) identify three distinct subgenres within the press conference format: political speech, question-and-answer sessions, and post-interview discussions, where each one is used strategically by speakers to achieve communicative goals effectively. Andone (2013) argues that the political press conference closely resembles a political interview, as both share a common target audience—the public, and a similar purpose of reshaping societal attitudes. Van Eemeren(2010) asserts that the institutional function of a political interview involves providing political explanations within the framework of institutional conventions, justifying one's position. In the context of a critical situation, the institutional function of a press conference is to inform the public about the crisis and to present the state's position as a responsible actor in addressing the situation.

Since the press conference is a form of public communication organized by government or state bodies to address specific issues with predefined roles, it is analyzed from both political and journalistic perspectives.

From a political perspective, a press conference represents a structured plan for public speech devised by state institutions to influence and appeal to public beliefs. From a journalistic perspective, it serves as a platform for showcasing journalistic autonomy and the right to investigate and scrutinize the subject matter (Ekström, 2015).

Wang and Ge concur with Ekström's perspective but further emphasize that a press conference also serves as a platform for the interplay of various social and linguistic forces, in addition to the political and journalistic influences (Wang and Ge, 2022).

The aspect of social relations is also a focus of scientific inquiry. Shaping public beliefs about a crisis involves not only raising social awareness but also fostering alignment and reconciliation among opposing sides affected by the crisis. Under such circumstances, the development of strategies to build trust among opposing sides becomes a key focus of research, alongside the government's strategic communication efforts.

Press conferences are also a subject of research from a rhetorical perspective. The communicative and linguistic behavior of responsible individuals reflects the unique characteristics and urgency of the crisis, as well as the ethos employed in their discourse.

Given that press conferences are often held in critical situations where politicians present the state's position to a skeptical audience—be it the public or journalists, they inherently take the form of an argumentative discussion.

Politicians emphasize the role of the state in evaluating critical situations while downplaying its responsibility. Journalists, on the other hand, serve as intermediaries between society and the government. According to the principles of journalism (APA principles of journalism, 2016), they are obligated to protect public interests and disseminate information that has been thoroughly verified.

The introductory segment of a press conference typically involves announcing the purpose of the gathering and providing an overview of the current situation. Monologue and interaction represent the most critical components of a press conference. The monologue stage involves an individual evaluation of the current situation, during which politicians provide facts and details about the incident, including reports on financial, human, and material losses, as well as the measures undertaken by the government. At this stage, politicians do not respond to journalists' questions but instead present the government's position, address anticipated questions, highlight their actions positively, support their arguments, and emphasize facts aimed at mitigating the government's perceived responsibility for the incident. During the interaction stage, journalists pose questions, speakers determine who will respond, and participants take turns engaging in dialogue. In this context, politicians act not only as defendants but also as managers of the interaction (Clayman, 2006:251; Eriksson, 2011:3332). Thornborrow (2002:27) further argues that politicians are not only "managers of talk" but also control "territorial power," enabling them to sidestep critical questions that they prefer not to address.

Clayman and Heritage (2002:8) argue that the presence of multiple journalists significantly alters the dynamics of interaction during a press conference. Specifically, it reduces the likelihood of individual journalists posing follow-up questions or receiving comprehensive answers. Conversely, it allows political figures to adhere to their predetermined agendas by presenting their political stances and adopting various techniques and arguments to reduce perceived responsibility for the issue.

Clayman and Heritage (2002:8) argue that press conferences primarily serve political purposes rather than journalistic ones. Van Eemeren asserts that communicative activities are conventionalized, implying that they follow established norms and are structured to address particular institutional needs.

Bhatia emphasizes the importance of studying how politicians obscure reality and employ ambiguous expressions, modal verbs, technical terminology, and other linguistic strategies to achieve diplomatic objectives. According to Galperin (1977:287), speeches delivered by government representatives fall within

the realm of rhetorical and publicistic style, aiming to exert a profound and lasting influence on societal beliefs. These speeches are designed to convince the audience that the interpretation provided is the sole truth. The objectives of such discourse are primarily achieved through the use of emotive language rather than through logical reasoning or argumentation.

It is unquestionable that the press conference functions as a form of strategic communication serving institutional needs. However, whether a press conference represents the fulfillment of a premeditated strategic communication plan or an emergent selection of a communicative strategy driven by situational necessity continues to be debated.

Hallahan (2007) defines communicative strategy as: "an approach (...) to ensure information transfer (...) in order to gain compliance and to establish networks to ensure the organization's power in relation to the public". Instead, it is argued that greater attention should be given to the emergent properties of strategies that arise from ongoing interactions.

Other researchers highlight the urgency of the strategies employed during interactions. King (2009), for example, emphasizes the need to focus on the emergent properties of strategies. Similarly, Marchiori and Bulgacov(2012) argue that strategy should be viewed as a communicative practice both within and of organizations. Sandhu (2009) adds an institutional perspective, advocating for an approach that is particularly attentive to how contextual logics shape organizational practices.

Revisiting Mintzberg's five types of strategy (1987) suggests that strategic communication can be conceptualized as existing on a continuum between intentional and emergent strategies, contingent upon the specific empirical context in which the strategizing occurs.

Mintzberg offers five approaches to understanding, analyzing, and practicing strategic communication: as plans, ploys, patterns, positions, and/or perspectives. Plans refers to strategic communication as consciously intended courses of action taken by organizations; ploys refers to strategic communication as specific and measured, but not planned, communicative manoeuvers organizations do in order to leverage new situations; patterns refers to strategic communication as consistency in communicative behavior, either deliberate or unconscious; positions refers to strategic communication as emergent positions organizations communicatively gets and/or takes in a given environment and perspectives refers to strategic communication as unconscious and unquestioned communicative behavior, where strategy is to the organization what personality is to the individual.

The continuum from intentional to emergent strategic communication is regarded as an independent and distinct framework for conceptualizing strategic communication. These approaches can be applied both simultaneously and sequentially, depending on the context and requirements of the situation.

Fuller-Love and Cooper (2000) illustrate that organizations do not face a binary choice between deliberate and emergent strategies. Instead, strategies often emerge and subsequently evolve into concrete plans, and vice versa. Rather than adopting an "either/or" approach, strategy should be understood through a "yes, please, both" perspective, where deliberate, rational, and linear strategic planning integrates with adaptive and incremental learning processes (Brews & Hunt, 1999).

Mintzberg elaborates on this idea by proposing a continuum that spans from the most rationally planned strategy to the most emergent, with five types of strategies positioned between these extremes (Mintzberg, 1987; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). The continuum acknowledges that organizations engage in both deliberate and emergent strategic decision-making. In some cases, organizations articulate carefully considered intentions (plans), distribute them throughout the organization, and then proceed to implement them.

Accordingly, a press conference, as a form of institutional communication within an institutional context, is inherently strategic. It represents a rationally planned strategy, a comprehensively developed action plan that remains adaptable, allowing for changes, improvisation, or replacement to align with the immediate communicative objectives dictated by the context.

Data Collecting and Methods of the Study

Given the procedural and generic elements of a press conference as a strategic communication tool, special attention is paid to the monologue and question-and-answer segment among the other major components. As long as the speakers have "territorial power" and this part is not interrupted by journalists, they use various linguistic manipulations to fulfill institutional responsibilities, follow the governing body's strategy, exceed the target audience's expectations, and influence their attitudes in order to shape their beliefs and subsequent decisions. As for the Q/A part, interaction is partially led by journalists and speakers, who lose control of it to some extent.

As for the channel of discourse—the press conference—it is a special framework for defaming the results of numerous rehearsals and discussions by experts, with carefully chosen words clearly indicating what should be conveyed to a wide audience.

Corpus-based comparative analysis of a small number of press conference discourses directed by leading persons responsible for pandemic crisis management presents a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the monologue and question-and-answer part (therefore Q/A) of COVID-19-related discourse.

Speakers are picked depending on their level of responsibility, particularly government figures whose primary interests are to alleviate common concerns, appeal to society to remain calm, and shape their ideas in order to influence their subsequent actions in response to the Covid epidemic. speakers We compared the monologue and Q/A portions of speakers' discourses to demonstrate that the press conference is a continuum from purposeful to emergent, depending on the precise empirical situation in which the strategizing occurs.

To maintain a strategic distance from the examination of an individual discourse idiosyncrasy, we chose talks coordinated by diverse speakers (representatives of administration (presidents and prime ministers and medicals like chief medical advisor to the president of the United States and director of the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC))) over a 2019-2022 timeline.The timings for research attention in the United States correspond to pandemic outbreak times before and after developing the vaccine. To compare the monologue and Q/A part, first of all, we identified markers that cov-19-related discourse features. Generic analysis of COVID-19-related discourse clarified that it features peculiarities of political and medical discourses and rhetoric as well (see article for more details: COV-19-RELATED DISCOURSE GENERIC ANALYSES. International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science, (4(40). https://doi.org/10.31435/rsglobal_ijitss/30122023/8094)).

Furthermore, corpus-based analysis of COVID-19-related discourse allowed us to identify the most commonly used markers, which are medical discourse markers (each denoted by M and its own cardinal number; for example, M1 stands for medical terminology and words, M2 is a description of the COVID-19 condition, M3 is medical recommendations, and M4 is relieving patients) and political discourse markers (denoted by P and its own cardinal number): P1 is intimidating; P2 is promoting one's own successes; P3 is addressing society; P4 is promising; P5 is metonymy; P6 is metaphor; P7 is pathos; P8 is parallelism, and P9 is the rule of three; P10 is euphemism; P11 is comparing to other countries; P12 is citing, naming authoritative individuals, organizations; and P13 is blaming others for unfavorable COVID-19 results.

It should be noted that discourse markers are chosen based on observation, hence there are distinct markers with distinctive recurrence. The next step was to tag identified political and medical signals in empirical data and analyze it using the software Orange.

Corpus based analyses gave us an Absolute and Correlative Number (CN) (number of each discourse marker usage correlated with the total number of a sentence used in each discourse) of each marker usage as well as frequency.

It should also be mentioned that empirical material does not include journalistic queries because they are not relevant to the research objectives.

The occurrence of markers according to corpus-based analysis allowed us to compare and contrast the frequency and distribution of per discourse marker in the monologue and Q/A sections, as well as throughout the press conference.

A corpus-based comparative and contrastive analysis of discourses directed by representatives from the United States adds to a better understanding of press conferences as strategic communication tools for crisis management.

Results and Discussion

A COVID-19-related press conference is a structured type of public communication hosted by governmental or institutional organizations. It follows a meticulously prepared plan to influence and reshape public opinion through the strategic use of linguistic and extralinguistic means.

According to Kjeldsen (2003), press conferences serve as rhetorical responses to urgent situations, addressing information deficiencies and the necessity of disseminating updates. However, the manner in which information is conveyed varies across different segments of the press conference. in monologic discourse, speakers implement their communication strategies without interruption. Notably, they emphasize the government's role in assessing the current situation while simultaneously minimizing its responsibility for the incident. In contrast, the interactive segment (Q&A session) is not primarily intended for the dissemination of information but rather serves as a platform for defending governmental positions against criticism and accusations from opponents.

Accordingly, the linguistic manipulations employed in both monologic discourse and Q&A sessions distinctly highlight the linguistic characteristics of press conferences as a form of strategic communication.

A corpus-based linguistic analysis of COVID-19-related discourse has enabled the identification of the most frequently used markers, namely: Medical Terminology and Semantically Related Vocabulary (M1), Reassurance of Public Health Measures (M4), Threatening by depiction of Potential Risks (P1), Citations of Authoritarian Entities (P12), Description of the Current Health Situation (M2), Highlighting Governmental Achievements (P2), Ethos-Emotional Appeal (P7).

Table 1. Absolute and Relative Number of Markers Used in COVID-19-Related Discourse

| Total	Discourse markers	Absolute number	Correlative number
7969	M1	2098	0.26327
7969	M2	560	0.070272
7969	M3	110	0.013803
7969	M4	1265	0.15874
7969	M5	12	0.001506
7969	M6	99	0.012423
7969	M7	33	0.004141
7969	P1	754	0.094617
7969	P2	534	0.06701
7969	P3	207	0.025976
7969	P4	339	0.04254
7969	P5	194	0.024344
7969	P6	275	0.034509
7969	P7	459	0.057598
7969	P8	131	0.016439
7969	P9	33	0.004141
7969	P10	51	0.0064
7969	P11	135	0.016941
7969	P12	718	0.090099
7969	P13	23	0.002886184
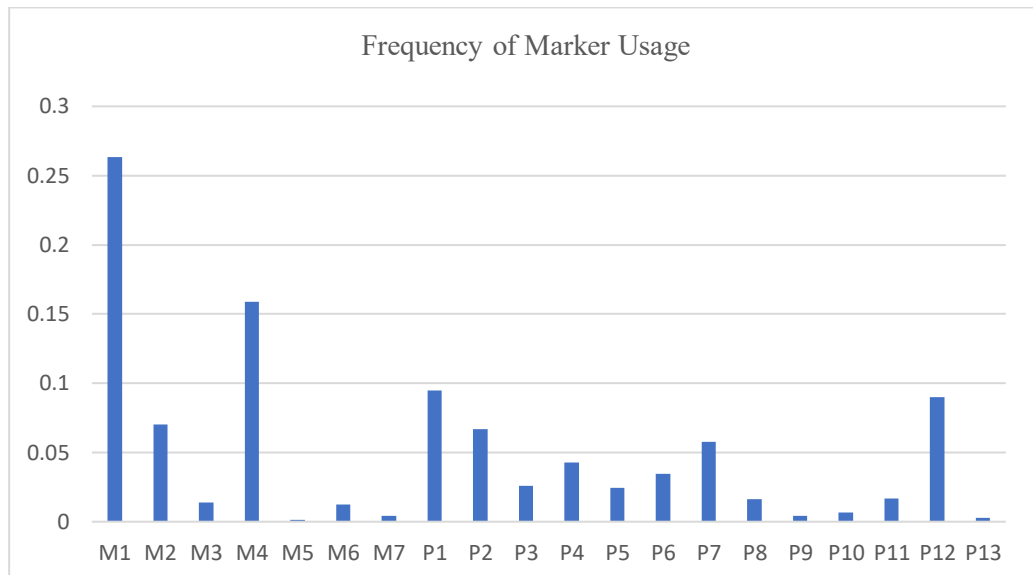
Fig 1. Frequency of Marker Usage in COVID-19-Related Discourse

The most frequently used marker in the discourse is M1(0,26), which pertains to medical terminology and semantically related vocabulary:

corona virus, screening, disease, emergency operation centres, hospital, doctor, patient, physicians, coronavirus, plague, symptoms, pharmacy, epidemies, flu, laboratories, test, testing, etc,.

The following marker is M4(0,15)- Reassuring the public regarding the COVID-19 situation involves statements from speakers affirming that the situation is under control, that there is no shortage of medical personnel or supplies, and that potential challenges related to employment or income resulting from the pandemic's crisis management will be mitigated: *(example 1)*

(1) This was a medical problem; we are not going to let it turn into a long-lasting financial problem. It started out as a purely medical problem, and it's not going to go beyond that.

(https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-coronavirus-task-force-briefing-transcript-march-23)

The third most frequently used marker is P1 (0.09), which falls under the political discourse category and is associated with threatening rhetoric. This marker involves emphasizing the mortality rate and portraying a grim outlook for the future if the public fails to adhere to medical or general regulations, among other precautions. (example 2,3)

(2) It's looking like it's heading to 50,000 or more deaths, deaths, not cases.

(3) Look, this is a severe medical situation that could cause problems far beyond the medical, and then increase the medical problems to things that had nothing to do with this original medical problem.

(https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-coronavirus-task-force-briefing-transcript-march-23)

The following most frequently used political discourse marker is P12 (0.09), which involves referencing authoritative figures, private or state organizations, or businesses to highlight their support. It is noteworthy that the majority of these authoritative figures are from the United States, with only a limited number of external authority figures being mentioned.

General motors, Ford, 3M, G20, FDA, CDC, World Health Organization, White House Coronavirus Task Force, FEMA, U.S Public Health Services, Center of Public Integrity, Strategic National Stockpile, Army Corps of Engineers, NIH, Federal Government representatives, etc.

The next most frequently used marker is P2 (0.06), which highlights the effectiveness of the measures implemented, the policies applied, and the crisis management efforts of individuals or the state, often presenting an overestimation of their success. (example 4,5)

(4) Great progress is being made at a rapid pace—a pace like no other.

(5) we're slowing the spread .We're protecting the most vulnerable.We're saving lives.

(https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/april-23-2020-task-force-briefing-coronavirus-pandemic)

The next marker, M2, belongs to medical discourse and involves describing the COVID-19-related situation. This includes referencing the number of affected individuals, medical supplies, vaccines, hospitals, and the current state of various sectors (e.g., economic, educational, medical) in the country as a result of the pandemic. (example 6)

(6) the test positivity rate is down among all age groups and has fallen below 5 percent for the first time since this whole nightmare of the China virus began. So it's fallen below 5 percent.

(https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-1262)

It should be noted that the frequency of stylistic devices used is also significant. The following marker frequently employed by speakers is P7—pathos, which is the preferred method for evoking an emotional response from the public. This is typically achieved through the use of key words such as "life," "live," and expressions related to self-care and concern for others.(example 7)

(7) To every single American, please know that the sacrifice you're making at this time is saving lives—many, many lives.

(https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-coronavirus-task-force-briefing-transcript-march-23)

The next most commonly used marker is P4, which represents "promising." It typically refers to commitments related to equipping the country with essential supplies, ensuring social insurance and support, and providing access to vaccines, among other matters.(example 8)

(8) And we will continue to work with the CDC to keep those individuals as safe as possible during these challenging times.

(https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/april-15-2020-press-briefing-coronavirus-task-force)

Another stylistic device frequently used by the speakers is the metaphor (P6), which is often employed to make statements more memorable or easier to grasp.(example 9, 10)

(9) It would be a gift from God if it worked. That would be a big game-changer.

(10) We're going to win the battle.
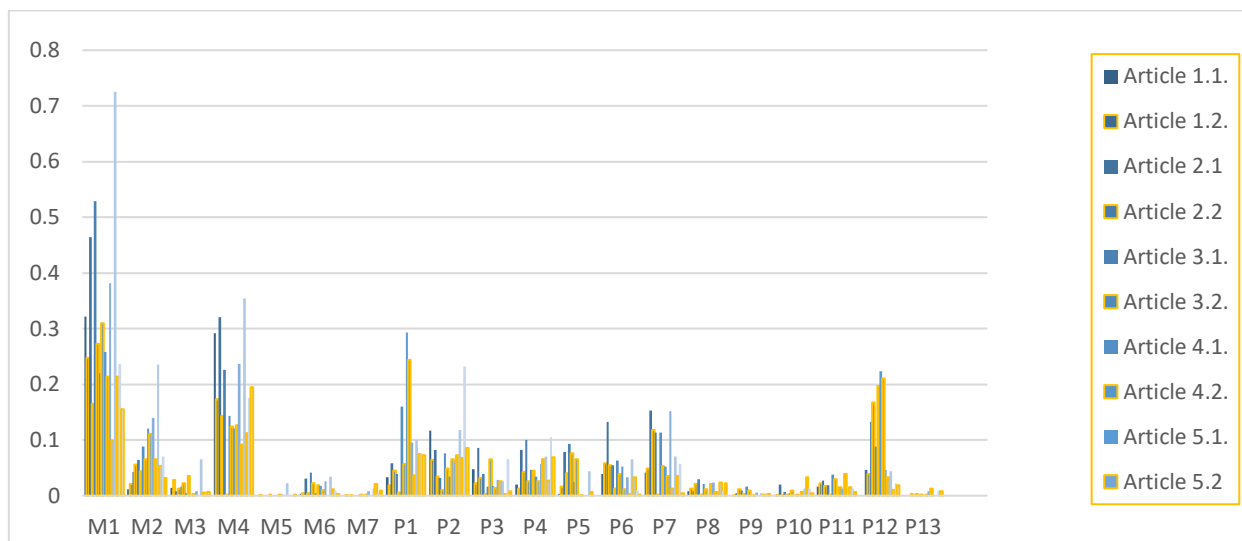
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icwXFrwOwiY)

Fig. 2. Comparative Figure of Marker Usage in Monologue and Q&A Sections

As Bitzer (1980:23) asserts, a rhetor's primary task is to "discover and make use of proper constraints in his message in order that his response, in conjunction with other constraints operative in the situation, will influence the audience."

Ekstrom and Erikson(2017) abstracts three subgenres of press-conference: political speech, question and answer and post interview.

This article aims to investigate the frequency and sequence of marker usage, with particular emphasis on two essential components of a press conference:political speech which is planned monologue, and the question-and-answer session, which is constrained by the situation.

Table 2. Correlation of Marker Frequency in Monologue and Question-and-Answer (Q/A) Session

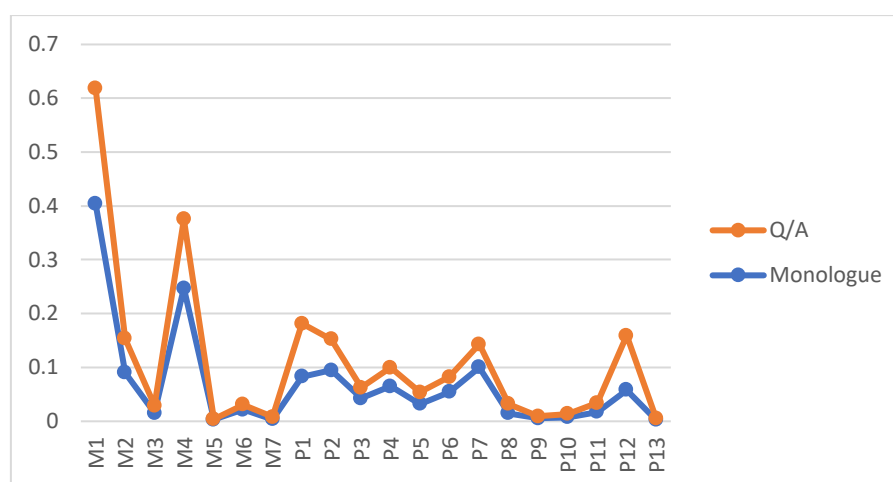| Discourse Markers	Monologue	Q/A
M1	0.403678606	0.214128409
M2	0.090513069	0.063188209
M3	0.015488867	0.01321362
M4	0.247337851	0.127731662
M5	0.002904163	0.001016432
M6	0.021297193	0.009317296
M7	0.00338819	0.00440454
P1	0.082768635	0.098763341
P2	0.094869313	0.057259021
P3	0.042594385	0.020159241
P4	0.064859632	0.034728104
P5	0.031945789	0.02168389
P6	0.054695063	0.027443673
P7	0.100193611	0.042690158
P8	0.01500484	0.016940539
P9	0.005324298	0.003726919
P10	0.007260407	0.006098594
P11	0.017424976	0.016771133
P12	0.058083253	0.101304421
P13	0.002420136	0.003049297

Fig. 3. *Marker Frequency in Monologue and Question-and-Answer (Q/A) Session*

A press conference, as a critical communicative event, represents an argumentative discourse between journalists and politicians, encompassing speech acts such as the articulation and defense of a standpoint, which are routinely subjected to challenge by journalists or opposing participants.

As Andone (2013) states political press-conference looks like political interview as much as the target audience is society and purpose- reshaping the social attitude.

A corpus-based analysis reveals that the maximum frequency difference for individual discourse markers between monologue and question-and-answer (Q/A) segments is 0.18. Markers predominantly utilized in monologues include M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M6, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, and P10. Conversely, markers exhibiting a higher frequency in Q/A segments compared to monologues are M7, P1, P8, P12, and P13.

 A corpus-based analysis indicates a high degree of similarity in the interconnection of discourse markers between the monologue and question-and-answer (Q/A) segments of the press conference. The markers consistently favored by speakers in both sections, based on the sequence of marker usage frequency, include M1, M4, M2, M6, P11, M3, and P10.

The observed alternation of specific discourse markers between monologue and question-and-answer (Q/A) segments—specifically, P2↔P1, P3↔P5, M6↔P6, P9↔M7, and M5↔P13 suggests distinct communicative strategies employed in each context. In monologues, speakers tend to emphasize their own achievements, whereas in Q/A sessions, there is a greater propensity for employing stylistic devices.

Table 3. Correlation of Discourse Marker Usage Between Monologue
and Question-and-Answer (Q/A) Segments

Monologue	M1	M4	P7	P2	M2	P1	P4	P12	P6	P3	P5	M6	P11	M3	P8	P10	P9	M7	M5	P13
Q/A	M1	M4	P12	P1	M2	P2	P7	P4	P6	P5	P3	P8	P11	M3	M6	P10	M7	P9	P13	M5

Van Eemeren (2010:130) posits that communicative activity types are conventionalized to address institutional exigencies. Consequently, in both political speeches and interactive segments, speakers utilize discourse markers with comparable frequency, irrespective of whether they are in control of the situation.

Conclusions

The dual deployment of political and medical discourse within COVID-19-related press conferences, as evidenced by corpus analysis, underscores their function as strategic communication platforms.

The frequency and sequential patterning of preferred discourse markers elucidate the strategic communication objectives of government-led messaging, such as informing, persuading, and mobilizing public support during the pandemic to meet the exigency of information dissemination. This highlights the deployment of linguistic techniques designed to shape public perception and influence behavior.

A comparative analysis of discourse marker frequencies in monologic and question-and-answer (Q/A) segments reveals a high degree of similarity, albeit with certain markers exhibiting statistically significant

differences in frequency. This observed consistency suggests that discourse marker usage is relatively stable across both strategically planned and situationally emergent discourses. However, speakers tend to employ a more positive affective tone in pre-planned speeches. The consistent preferential use of specific discourse markers across both contextual types indicates that speakers are oriented toward fulfilling institutional responsibilities, irrespective of the setting. Across both modalities, speakers prioritize the portrayal of the current situation, the provision of recommendations, the assertion of national superiority via comparative framing, and the mitigation of anxieties concerning prevailing circumstances.

A comparative analysis indicates that, regardless of their capacity to control the situation, speakers in both monologue and Q/A segments act strategically, guided by institutional responsibilities. This observation aligns with the understanding that press conferences function as institutional communication platforms, characterized by rational planning and the development of action plans. These plans can be promptly adapted, improvised, or modified in response to specific communicative objectives within particular contexts in accordance with institutional responsibilities and action plans.

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