Press Conference Debates: A Conversational Analysis Study

Mohammad Alqatawna[1], & Abdallah Abu Quba[2]

[1] Preparatory Year Deanship, King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. E-mail: malqatawna@kfu.edu.sa

[2] Preparatory Year Deanship, King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. E-mail: AAbuqubu@kfu.edu.sa

Correspondence: Mohammad Alqatawna, Preparatory Year Deanship, King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. E-mail: malqatawna@kfu.edu.sa

Abstract

The study uses a dataset consisting of 30 videos of press conference debates involving the former US President Donald Trump and media reporters and journalists. With reference to the application of conversation analysis (CA), this study examines the opening sequences of press conference debates, revealing that journalists employ various tactics before asking questions. These tactics include expressing disagreement, using reporting speech to convey criticism, and directly criticizing the speaker. These strategies reflect the journalists' professionalism and expertise in the debated subject matter. The study also found that speakers often use accusations to counter evasive responses and shift the debate's focus towards a conclusion. This analysis highlights the tense and confrontational nature of press conference interactions. The power imbalance is evident in the act of taking turns, as reporters consistently construct questions based on their knowledge of the debate topic. The extent of power primarily depends on the effective use of available argumentative resources throughout the interaction.

Keywords: conversation analysis, press conference debates, institutional interaction, questions, interviews

1. Introduction

A press conference debate is a type of debate that is held in front of a group of journalists. These debates are typically held to discuss current events or political issues. They can be held by a variety of organizations, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses. Press conference debates are often lively and engaging discussions held in a public forum where representatives of different organizations or individuals with opposing viewpoints come together to present their arguments and engage in a debate. These debates are typically moderated by a neutral party, such as a journalist or a debate moderator, who ensures that the discussion remains fair and balanced. During a press conference debate, participants may be given the opportunity to make opening statements, present their arguments, and respond to questions from the moderator or the audience. The topics discussed can vary widely, ranging from politics and policy issues to social, economic, or scientific matters. The purpose of a press conference debate is to provide a platform for different perspectives to be heard and to foster a robust exchange of ideas. It allows representatives from various organizations, political parties, or interest groups to engage in a direct and public dialogue, often with the goal of influencing public opinion or policy decisions.

According to Clayman (2015) a press conference is one kind of news interviews where two significant social institutions, namely journalism and politics, converge. In news interviews, as opposed to speeches, lectures, or other forms of one-sided communication, public figures predominantly provide information and express opinions in response to journalists' questions (Heritage, 2002). Consequently, the resulting news content is a collaborative or conflictual construction that arises from the merging of the questions posed by journalists and the subsequent responses they elicit.

Many researchers claim the centrality and importance of the news interview. For example, Schudson (1994, p.565) states that it is "fundamental act of contemporary journalism" and Ekstrom (2001, 564) states that the interview is a dominant mode of production and presentation within journalism." However, other scholars defined interviews from a different perspective. Farr (1984: 182) claims that the very nature of interviews to elicit a personal perspective since the interview constitutes "a technique for establishing or discovering that there are perspectives or viewpoints on events other than those of the person initiating the interview."

The current study highlights, first, what reporters do at the beginning of an interaction. Journalist questions often go beyond simple interrogatives. Prior to asking the actual question, journalists typically provide a preface or preliminary statement(s) (Clayman, 2001). This serves to offer the interviewee and/or the audience with necessary background information to comprehend the significance of the question. According to Heritage and Clayman (2010), this practice is considered predominant or even normative. By providing contextual information, journalists clarify the relevance of a question that might otherwise appear unrelated. Thus, investigating press conference debates informs us not only how journalists design their statements, but also how other recipients respond back to them.

Overall, press conference debates serve as an important component of democratic societies, promoting transparency, accountability, and the free exchange of ideas. They provide a platform for public discourse and help shape public opinion on a wide range of issues. This study

aims to investigate the opening of press conference debates, how recipients react to reporters, and how is the power asymmetry is manifested in such interactions.

2. Conversation Analysis and Institutional Discourse

The central principle of conversation analysis, according to Psathas (1995), is that order is produced, orderliness, situated, and occasioned, and repeatable and recurrent. In terms of "order is produced orderliness," order does not exist prior to interaction or happen spontaneously; instead, it is the result of organized practices by the participants themselves, who accomplish orderliness through their interactions. Participants are aware of the order being produced, and their behaviour reflects and indexes that order. An example provided by Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998) illustrates the concept of orderliness, where a mother asks her son if he knows who will attend a meeting. The recipient's response to the question reveals their interpretation and allows for analysis of their understanding and reaction.

Conversation analysis also encompasses the study of institutional interaction in various settings, including news interviews, courtrooms, classrooms, and doctor-patient interactions. Formal settings involve institutional interactions with a formal character, such as courtroom interactions, news interviews, and classroom interactions. Non-formal settings, on the other hand, deal with less formal institutional interactions in contexts like medical, psychiatric, social-service, and business environments, often occurring in private settings (Drew & Heritage, 1992).

The concept of institutional interaction originates from a conversation analysis (CA) perspective. Arminen (2017) defines institutional interaction as a specific type of social interaction in which participants (A & B) engage within an institutional context (C), such as medical, juridical, or educational, to carry out their distinct institutional actions. This aligns with the CA approach, as Heritage & Drew (1992) argue that studying institutional interaction aims to describe how institutions are enacted and experienced through accountable patterns of meaning, inference, and action. By focusing directly on recorded conduct, this approach overcomes challenges related to the gap between beliefs and actions or between what people say and what they do. Heritage & Drew (1992, p.22), outline the characteristics of institutional interactions as follows:

a) Institutional interactions involve participants orienting to core goals, tasks, or identities associated with the institution in question. Institutional talk is influenced by relatively restricted and conventional forms of goal orientations.

b) Institutional interactions often have specific constraints on what participants can contribute to the discussion.

c) Institutional talk is associated with inferential frameworks and procedures specific to particular institutional contexts.

Perhaps the best way to define institutional discourse is as a type of interaction where the dynamic between a participant's current institutional role (such as interviewer, caller to a phone-in programme, or teacher) and their current discursive role (such as questioner, answerer, or opinion giver) emerges as a local phenomenon that shapes the structure and trajectory of the conversation. Together, a person's interactional and discursive function and their institutional identity and status determine the outcomes of their institutional encounters (Thornborrow, 2002).

Analyzing institutional interactions aims to explore issues such as strategic aspects of interaction, collaboration achievement, and procedures for aligning participants' differing perspectives (Arminen, 2017). This aligns with the original idea of Sacks, which is to study the systematic ways in which members accomplish social tasks through interaction. Institutional interactions frequently occur in designated physical settings like hospitals, courtrooms, or educational institutions, which are controlled settings. However, they can also take place over the telephone or in parliamentary settings. For example, parliamentary debate is a form of institutional interaction that occurs within a specific institutional framework. Drew & Heritage (2004) identifies six areas to explore the "institutionality" of interaction:

1. Turn-taking organization: Parliamentary interactions follow similar turn-taking rules as ordinary conversations but differ in several aspects, such as fixed turn order, restricted turn size, and specified topics.

2. Overall structural organization: This involves mapping the interaction's typical phases or sections, including opening, construction of actions, response, and closing. The organization is not fixed but emerges as parties orient their talk.

3. Sequence organization: CA focuses on how participants launch, develop, and work out interactions through sequences of actions.

4. Turn design: This aspect considers the action intended by a participant's speech and the means used to perform that action.

5. Lexical choice: Participants use specific terms in institutional interactions, such as "police officer" or "cop," reflecting the context they are in.

6. Interactional asymmetries: These encompass participation imbalances, differences in interactional and institutional knowledge, caution in epistemological matters, and rights of access to knowledge.

According to the research conducted by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), it has been established that turn-taking in news interviews adheres to a scripted pattern. The interactions between journalists and politicians in televised political debates are rather predictable and ritualised, and differ in a number of ways from ordinary conversation (Drew & Heritage, 1992). In contrast, typical discourse, individuals typically possess equal entitlements to engage in speaking roles, within the context of conversation. In institutional settings, it is possible to observe significant disparities in the allocation of resources. According to Drew (1992: 22), the term "communicative resources" refers

to a set of tools or means that individuals utilise in order to effectively communicate with others. During institutional interactions, the organisation of turn-taking, sequencing of actions, and initiation of topics follow a ritualistic and asymmetrical pattern. This pattern creates various expectations regarding the appropriate and permissible actions, roles, goals, and speaking rights of the participants involved in the interaction (Drew & Heritage, 1992).

The news interviews have been thoroughly researched in Conversation Analysis and in analyses of broadcast media talk (e.g. Clayman and Heritage 2002, Greatbatch, 1986, Heritage, 1985; Hutchby, 2005; Nylund, 2000). For example, Clayman and Heritage (2002, p.7) see the prototypical news interview as involving "a distinctive constellation of participants, subject matter, and interactional form." The interviews consist of a professional journalist and the interviewees have links to recent events as primary agents or informed commentators. The discussion focuses on recent events is highly formalin character and is managed through questions and answer (Clayman and Hertiage, 2002).

In news interviews, journalists often ask challenging and critical questions that can harm a politician's goals, career, and reputation if answered directly (Clayman, 2001). However, evading or avoiding these questions also has its disadvantages. Answering questions is seen as a moral duty, not only for public figures in interviews but for everyone involved (Heritage, 1984). This puts interviewees in a difficult position. They face pressure from journalists and the audience to answer straightforwardly, but when confronted with hostile questions, there is conflicting pressure to respond differently (Clayman, 2001). The increasing prevalence of adversarial questioning may have an unintended effect. When adversarialness includes a greater probability of asking probing follow-up questions to elicit direct answers from interviewees who try to evade, it could potentially result in interviewees being more inclined to stick closely to the initial line of questioning (Eriksson, 2011).

3. Power Asymmetry

According to Fairclough the concept of power refers to how powerful individuals control and limit the contributions of less powerful individuals in discourse (Fairclough, 2013). Power asymmetry in conversation refers to situations where one person has more power or authority than the other person, and as a result, the conversation is not equal or balanced (Hutchby, 1996a). In such conversations, the person with less power may feel intimidated or unable to express their thoughts and opinions freely, while the person with more power may dominate the conversation and dictate the direction and outcome of the discussion.

Although CA has historically shied away from concerns of power and other macro-related conceptions, more recently a number of academics (such as Hutchby, 1996a, 1996b, Thornborrow, 2002) have acknowledged the importance of CA in that it offers a fresh perspective on the investigation of power dynamics in institutional interactions. Hutchby has focused his research on exploring the relationship between conversation analysis, control, and power. In his publications, he argues that the study of conversation analysis in institutional or work-related settings can shed light on the dynamics of interpersonal power (Hutchby, 1996a). For example, Hutchby highlights Drew and Heritage's introductory remarks in their influential collection of studies on work-related conversations, which present a particular portrayal of interaction in institutional contexts. In talk radio programs, individuals from the public are encouraged to call the studio and engage in live discussions with the host about the topics being covered on that day's show (Hutchby, 1996a).

In addition, recent research has focused on news interviews, analysing different features of this crucial element of institutional dialogue. Studies have not just covered power dynamics and conflicts but also delved into the interactional structure of news interviews (e.g. Mayr, 2003; Greatbatch, 1998; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1988; Greatbatch, 1992; Wenjie, 2019).

Clayman and Heritage (2002) studied how journalists strike a balance between objective reporting and adversarial treatment of public figures during news interviews. They focused on journalists' strategies to remain neutral while engaging in debates. Heritage and Greatbatch (1988) examined the fundamental traits of broadcast news interviews and their impact on shaping the "news interview" genre. They highlighted the neutralistic approach of interviewers and interviewees' contributions in maintaining this stance. They also emphasized the significance of turn-taking in managing disagreements in interviews. Wenjie (2019) investigated the power dynamics present in television news interviews. It analyses how interviewers and interviewees interact with each other in terms of power relations during these interviews. In his findings, Wenjie found that power dynamics between interviewers and interviewees in the four TV news interviews are generally equal, but interviewers still hold more power on average. In addition, Power is exerted through discourse techniques such as the use of interrogative clauses, interruptions, formulations, initiating turns, and controlling topics. Lastly, the nature of news interviews grants journalists, who are the interviewers, a certain level of inherent power, as they have a duty to cover news issues (Wenjie, 2019).

4. Methodology

The data of the study consisted of 30 videos of press conference debates between the former US president Donald Trump and media reporters and journalists. The data was selected to represent different topics pertaining the achievements of the president covering the period between 2017 and 2021. The reasons of selecting such data is simply because it gives us significant information of how public figures such as Trump's reacts to questions, especially, in confrontational matters and how he evades from providing answers. The debate turns were transcribed and then analysed according to the conversation analysis standards (Jefferson, 2004). When transcribing the data, we incorporated different elements of language such as spoken words, sounds produced, sounds or words that were not audible, moments of silence, instances of overlapping speech or sounds, and the speed or loudness of speech or sounds (ten Have, 2007; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998).

Based on the use of recordings and the written document, the selected method for analysis was conversation analysis. This approach focuses on investigating how participants collaboratively initiate their speech turns and the resulting outcomes, specifically how they position themselves in relation to these turns (Clayman & Gill, 2004). Furthermore, the present study has made use of the "noticing method" (Clayman & Gill, 2004) to carefully observe and identify recurring actions performed by the participants. This approach has allowed us to uncover insights regarding how these actions are constructed, their sequential placement, how other participants respond to them, and the resulting outcomes (Clayman & Gill, 2004, p. 597). Moreover, we have incorporated a technique known as "deviant cases analysis" (ten Have, 2007) which employs the strategy of "analytic induction" to derive general statements from negative findings (ten Have, 2007). Therefore, distinguishing between recurrent and deviant cases relies, at least partially, on observing patterns of regularity (Pallotti, 2007, p. 59).

5. Result and Discussion

The following sections present the results and findings of press conference debates, namely, the opening of press conference debates, accusations as a mean of answer evasions, extended sequences of answer evasions, and power asymmetry in press conference debates. Each subtopic is supported by some of the examples extracted from the corpus.

5.1 The Opening

The openings of press conference debates have specific features. First, reporters' turns are always initiated by reporter as they would be selected to take part in the interaction by the speaker (O'Driscoll, 2018; O'Driscoll & Holt, 2021). Second, before formulating questions, reporter always tend to provide previous statements before the interaction takes place. In the following example, R (reporter) and DT (Donald Trump) discuss the characterization of a caravan of migrants moving towards the US border.

Example (1)

```
1   R:    Over the course(0.1)

2   DT:   Okay, just sit down please (1.3) but when you when you report

3   R:    Mr President coming that this caravan was an invasion as you
4         know

5   DT:   I consider it to be as numerous

6   R:    you know Mr President the caravan was not an invasion(0.1)
7         it's a it's a group of migrants moving up from Central America
8         towards the border with the US(0.1)

9   DT:   Thank you for telling me that I appreciate it

10  R:    Why did you why did you characterize it as such Ahhh (0.4)

11  DT:   Because I consider it an invasion you and I have a difference
12        of opinion (0.2)
```

In line 3, R begins first by addressing the talk to the speaker as "Mr. President called this caravan an invasion. DT responds by saying that he considers it to be numerous. R registers a disagreement with the characterization and explains that the caravan is a group of migrants moving from Central America towards the US border. DT appreciates R for the piece of information, and then R questions why DT characterized it as an invasion. DT responds by saying he considers it an invasion and acknowledges the difference of opinion between them. Overall, this conversation showcases a disagreement between R and DT regarding the characterization of the caravan as an invasion. R provides an alternative perspective, while DT maintains his position.

Similarly, Example (2) has been drawn from a press conference between Jee Jiang from CBS news and DT. The reporter uses reported speech and criticises the speaker before formulating a question.

Example (2)

```
  1   R:    Many Americans are saying the exact same thing about(0.1)
  2         you that you should have warned them the virus (0.1)
  3         was spreading like wildfire through the month of February
  4         (0.1)instead of holding rallies with thousands of people
  5   R:    Why did you wait so long on that(0.1)
  6   DT:   Who are you with?
  7   R:    and why did you not have  (0.1) social distancing until March
  8         16?
  9   DT:   Who are you with (0.1)
 10   R:    I'm Lee je Jiang with CBS News (0.2)
 11   DT:   So if you look at what I did in terms of (0.1) cutting off or
 12         banning China from coming in=
 13   R:    =chinese nationals (0.1) by the way not Americans, who are
 14         also …
 15   DT:   nice and easy, just relax (0.1)
 16   DT:   We cut it off People were amazed these gentlemen everybody was
 17         amazed that I did it(0.1) we were very early (0.1 I'm the
 18         president and you know what I just did? And you know what I
 19         just did (0.2)
 20   R:    by the way, when you issued the ban, the virus was already
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At the beginning of the interaction, throughout lines 1-3, the reporter provides some information that Americans have not been warned of the pandemic and that the spreading of the virus was like wildfire during February in 2020. The reporter, then, in lines 4 &5, implicitly criticises the speaker for not taking any action towards social distancing and at the same time. She immediately questions the speaker for the long delay of taking actions against the pandemic. In response to the reporter's questions and criticism, the speaker formulates a question (line 9), instead of providing an answer and stating the reason(s) for not having social distance until mid-March. This shows the question-and-answer sequence is incomplete, as the SPP of FPP is missing. While the speaker's question is designed to gain information from the reporter, the latter responded accordingly by providing the answer (line 10). Not only did the reporter reveal who she works for, but also she identified herself as Lee Je Jiang.

Noticeably, the speaker changed the scope of the debate i.e. changed the topic of the debate from Covid-19 to immigration. This denotes the speaker has not accurately complied to the reporter's question as in "why did you wait so long on that." The topic change appears to be rather vague and unclear and why was it said in this sense. On other side, the speaker's response could be an attempt to evade the response for not stating the reason of why social distance wasn't active until 16th of March.

Another remarkable design feature of the R's turn is that the statements includes implicit criticism of DT action against the pandemic. The criticism is formulated in a strong statement as if the reporter is speaking on behalf of the American citizens. Also the criticism occurs as advice giving (Hutchby, 2006; Heritage & Sefi, 1992).

In example (3) the reporter produces multiple statements before producing a question.

Example (3)

```
 1   DT:   It's really great to see everybody on this beautiful,
 2   beautiful day in Washington, DC. Okay Question Yeah go ahead Sure
 3   (2.0) She's shocked that I picked her It's not in a state of shock.

 4   R:    I'm not thinking [ about it.

 5   DT:                     [ That's okay I know you not thinking you
 6   never do.

 7   R:    I'm sorry (0.2)

 8   DT:   No go ahead go ahead

 9   R:    In a tweet this weekend Mr. President you said that it's
10   incorrect to say you're limiting the scope of the FBI investigation=

11   DT:   =What does that have to do with trade I don't mind answering
12   the question but you know I'd like to do [ the trade

13   R:                              [  It has to do with the other headline
14   in the news which is the (    )

15   DT:   I know but how about talking about trade and then we'll get to
16   that We'll do it later

17   R:    Do you think=

18   DT:   anybody have a trade deal

19   R:    your trade deal will pass through Congress sir
```

In line 9, the reporter (R) tried to ask President Trump (DT) about limiting the scope of the FBI investigation, likely referring to the investigation into Brett Kavanaugh. Trump deflected the question by saying he wanted to talk about trade deals instead. This appears to be an attempt to change the subject away from a potentially uncomfortable topic. When the reporter tried to bring the conversation back to the FBI investigation, Trump again deflected and insisted on talking about trade first (line 11). Trump seems unwilling or uninterested in directly answering questions about the FBI investigation scope. He tries to steer the conversation to topics he is more comfortable with or wants to promote (trade deals). There is a back and forth where the reporter tries to do their job and ask probing questions, while Trump attempts to set the agenda and discusses what he wants to talk about. This dynamic is common in press conferences with presidents and reporters. In summary, Trump is deflecting the conversation away from the FBI probe, which he likely wants to avoid discussing in detail, and instead is focusing on his preferred topic of trade deals. The reporter is pushing for answers while Trump is steering the discussion.

These examples show that in the opening sequence reporters use a variety of strategies before formulating questions including registering disagreements, using reporting speech as a mean of criticism, directly criticising the speaker. The use of such strategies illustrates that they professional and informed by the debated topic.

5.2 Accusations as a Mean of Answer Evasions

In ordinary conversations, participants recurrently comply to questions instantly by responding back to them. However, in this study, conversationalists may evade from answer questions using accusations. Example (4) illustrates how the speaker evades from answer questions.

Example (4)

```
 1   R1:   what do you say to Americans who are upset with you over the
 2         way you down played this crisis over the last couple of months

 3   DT:   we have it very much under control in this country(0.2) the
 4         coronavirus is very much under control in the USA(0.1)It's
 5         going to disappear(0.5) It's like a miracle It will disappear
 6         March 4 we have a very small number of people in this country
 7         infected(0.1) March 10 we're prepared(0.1) we're doing a great
 8         job with it It will go away just stay calm(0.1) it will go
 9         away what [ do you say to Americans]

10            |      [    … it will go away  ]

11   R1:   believe that you got this wrong(0.1)

12   DT:   instead of asking a nasty, snarky question like that you
13         should ask a real question(0.2) and other than that I'm going
14         to go to somebody else(0.1) please go ahead Please

15   R2:   Mr. President you've said several times that the United States
16         has ramped up testing(0.1)but the United States is still not
17         testing per capita(0.5) as many people as other countries like
18         South Korea(0.1) why is that and when do you think that that
19         number(0.1) will be on par with other countries=
```

In line 1, R1 begins by questioning DT about the criticism he received from Americans who were upset over his handling of the crisis in the past couple of months. R1 highlights that many people believe DT downplayed the severity of the crisis. The reporter makes several statements said by Trump. First, "we have it very much under control in this country" and reiterates, "the coronavirus is very much under control in the USA." (see lines 3-9).   These statements suggest that DT believes the situation is under control and not as serious as some people may think. Next, the reporter quotes   by saying, "It's going to disappear" and compares it to a miracle (lines 4-5). He even specifies a date, saying, "It will disappear March 4" (lines 5&6). These statements imply that DT believes the virus will vanish on its own, without the need for significant intervention. In addition, the reporter continues an optimistic stance by stating, "we have a very small number of people in this country infected" and asserts on March 10 that "we're prepared." These statements suggest that DT believes the number of infected individuals is relatively low and that the country is adequately equipped to handle the situation. Having formulated Triump's statements, the reporter immediately formulates a question using "what do you say to the Americans?" This led DT to interject y saying "it will go away." When R1 interrupts to express disagreement, stating, "believe that you got this wrong," (line 11) DT responds defensively. He criticizes R1 for asking a "nasty, snarky question" and suggests that a "real question" should be asked instead. DT then indicates he wants to select another reporter, saying, "I'm going to go to somebody else (Alqatawna, 2022)." From this analysis, it can be observed that DT portrays a positive and optimistic outlook on the crisis, emphasizing that it will disappear and that the situation is under control. R1 challenges this perspective, leading to a defensive response from DT. The conversation appears to be contentious and lacking a substantive exchange of information.

The design features of the reporter's turn indicates that the use of epistemics (Heritage, 2011; Heritage, 2012) i.e., shared knowledge as preliminary move before formulating the question "what do you say to the Americans?" However, the speaker's turn is an accusation of the reporter instead of complying to the question. The lack of complying back to the reporter's question shows that the speaker is in a weaker position and thus evades from answer through the use of this strategy.

5.3 Extended Sequences of Accusations

In extended sequences, reports persist into questioning the speaker despite not receiving an answer to their questions. In example (5), the reporter has formulated several attempts to question the speaker. This conversation displays a confrontational exchange between DT and R. R asks a question about potential indictments, which prompts DT to walk away momentarily. Upon his return, DT launches into a critique of R, CNN, and their treatment of Sarah Huckabee Sanders. The conversation reflects a tense atmosphere and a lack of substantive engagement with the original question.

Example (5)

```
 1   R:    excuse me Mr. President

 2   DT:   That's enough

 3   R:    Mr. President if I may ask, on the Russia investigation are
 4         you concerned that you may have

 5   DT:   I'm not concerned about anything with Russia investigation
 6         because it's a hoax

 7   R:    Are you …

 8   DT:   That's enough Put down the mic

 9   R:    Mr. President are you worried about indictments coming down in
10         this investigation (2.3)

11   DT:   ((walks away from podium and then returns back))

12   R:    Mr. President

13   DT:   I'll tell you what CNN should be ashamed of itself having you
14         working for them You are a rude, terrible person You shouldn't
15         be working for CNN (1.1)Go ahead I think that's on you're a
16         very rude person The way you treat Sarah Huckabee is horrible
17         and the way you treat other people are horrible you shouldn't
18         treat people that way Go ahea(0.2) Go ahead, Peter

19

20   R2:   In Jim's defence I've travelled with him and watched him He's
21         a diligent reporter who busted

22   DT:   well I'm not a big fan of yours either
```

In line 9, R starts by asking DT if he is worried about indictments coming down in a certain investigation. However, before DT responds, he walks away from the podium briefly and then returns. DT, upon his return, immediately criticizes R and CNN (line 13). He states, "I'll tell you what CNN should be ashamed of itself having you working for them." This remark indicates his disapproval of R's affiliation with CNN. DT continues by expressing his negative opinion of R, calling them a "rude, terrible person" and asserting that they shouldn't be working for CNN. DT then brings up the treatment of Sarah Huckabee, likely referencing Sarah Huckabee Sanders, who served as White House Press Secretary during DT's presidency. He criticizes R's behaviour towards Huckabee and accuses them of treating her and other people poorly. This criticism suggests that DT perceives bias or unfair treatment from R. Despite his critical remarks, DT eventually allows R to proceed with their question, saying, "Go ahead, Peter." This indicates that DT is willing to let R ask their question, albeit with a tone of disapproval and dissatisfaction.

In another example, the conversation devolves into personal criticisms and accusations. This conversation involves an exchange between DT (presumably Donald Trump) and R2 (presumably another reporter or journalist). This is illustrated in example (6).

Example (6)

```
 1   R:    excuse me Mr. President

 2   DT:   That's enough

 3   R:    Mr. President if I may ask, on the Russia investigation are
 4         you concerned that you may have

 5   DT:   I'm not concerned about anything with Russia investigation
 6         because it's a hoax

 7   R:    Are you …

 8   DT:   That's enough Put down the mic

 9   R:    Mr. President are you worried about indictments coming down in
10         this investigation (2.3)
```

```
11   DT:   ((walks away from podium and then returns back))

12   R:    Mr. President

13   DT:   I'll tell you what CNN should be ashamed of itself having you
14         working for them You are a rude, terrible person You shouldn't
15         be working for CNN (1.1)Go ahead I think that's on you're a
16         very rude person The way you treat Sarah Huckabee is horrible
17         and the way you treat other people are horrible you shouldn't
18         treat people that way Go ahea(0.2) Go ahead, Peter |

19   R2:   In Jim's defence I've travelled with him and watched him He's
20         a diligent reporter who busted

21   DT:   well I'm not a big fan of yours either

22   R2:   I understand

23   DT:   to be honest

24   R2:   So let me ask you a question if I can

25   R2:   you repeatedly said

26   DT:   you aren't you aren't the best

27   R2:   Mr. President you repeatedly over the course you

28   DT:   just sit down please (1.3) well when you when you report fake
29         news no when you report fake news which CNN does a lot you are
30         the enemy of the people go ahead

31   R2:   Mr. president O over the course of the last several days of
32         the campaign sir sir at the end of the campaign you repeatedly
33         said that Americans need to fear democrats you said would
34         unleash a wave of violent crime that endangers families
35         everywhere
```

In line 19, R2 starts by defending Jim, who is likely another reporter, stating that they have travelled with him and witnessed his diligence in reporting. R2 tries to vouch for Jim as a dedicated journalist who has broken important stories. In response, DT dismisses R2's defence and states, "well, I'm not a big fan of yours either." This indicates DT's lack of appreciation or approval for R2's work or stance. R2 acknowledges DT's comment by saying, "I understand" (line 22). This implies that R2 acknowledges DT's perspective, possibly accepting that DT has a negative opinion of their work. DT then interjects by saying, "to be honest," which suggests that he is about to express his candid opinion on the matter. R2 attempts to redirect the conversation by asking DT a question, but before they can complete their question, DT interrupts and says, "you aren't the best." This comment appears to be a dismissive remark, implying that DT does not hold R2 in high regard as a journalist. R2 persists by trying to raise an issue, stating, "Mr. President, you repeatedly over the course you..." but is interrupted again by DT. DT tells R2 to "just sit down" and accuses CNN of reporting fake news. He further asserts that reporting fake news makes them the "enemy of the people." This conversation demonstrates a contentious exchange between DT and R2. R2 attempts to defend another reporter's integrity, but DT responds with dismissive remarks and accuses R2 and CNN of reporting fake news. The conversation lacks a substantial discussion of the initial topic and instead devolves into personal criticisms and accusations.

Example (7)

```
1    DT:   I saved tens of thousands maybe hundreds of thousands of lives

2    R:    (…) the time that you bought the arguments is that you bought
3          yourself some time(0.1) you didn't even use it to prepare
4          hospitals you didn't use it to ramp up testing [right now]

5    DT:                                              [You're so]

6          [you're so disgraceful                    ]

7    R:    [over the 20 million people are unemployed]

8    DT:   It's so disgraceful the way you said it [let me just listen]
9    [ … Americans were dead] |

10   DT:   I just went over it

11   R:    (                  ) unpresented crisis(0.1)

12   DT:   nobody thought we should do it(0.1) and when I did it you know
13   what we did

14   R:    But what did you do with the time that you bought
```

In line 1, DT begins by making a claim, stating, "I saved tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of lives." He implies that his actions or decisions have had a significant impact on saving lives during a certain situation or crisis. In line 2, R responds to DT's claim by stating that the time he bought with his actions was not effectively utilized. R suggests that the time bought was not used to prepare hospitals or increase testing capacity, which implies a criticism of DT's handling of the situation. In response, DT interrupts R and accuses them of being disgraceful (line 6). In line 7, R then brings up the issue of unemployment, stating that over 20 million people are unemployed. This statement likely highlights the negative impact of the situation or crisis on the economy and job market. DT responds again, describing R's statement as disgraceful and requesting to listen further, suggesting that DT wants to hear more from R or respond to their point (line 8). From this analysis, it is evident that the conversation is tense and confrontational. DT asserts that his actions have saved lives, while R criticizes the utilization of the time bought and highlights the issue of unemployment. The conversation lacks a constructive exchange of ideas and instead involves accusations and disagreements.

Examples 5, 6, and 7 clearly show the speaker relies heavily of the use of accusations as a mean of 'answering evasions' (Clayman & Heritage,2002). Using such strategies enables the speaker to change the scope of the debate and lead it to closure. The above analysis shows that press conference interactions can be tense and confrontational. Another observation is that the interaction fails to engage in a meaningful exploration of the initial subject matter and instead descends into personal critiques and allegations. Finally, speaker may shows signs disapproval and disaffiliation of reporters.

5.4 Power Asymmetry in Press Conference Debates

In radios talk shows, it appears that the callers possess a certain level of influence over the proceedings, which the hosts do not have. However, Hutchby (1996a) suggests that despite this perception, callers paradoxically find themselves in a vulnerable and relatively powerless position because they are expected to initiate the discussion topic. Referring to previous research on arguments, Hutchby argues that those who speak second in an argument hold a position of power since they can challenge an expressed opinion or viewpoint simply by dissecting it. It does not necessarily require presenting an alternative argument. Consequently, those who speak first are in a weaker position as they may be compelled to defend their initial argument.

In press conference debates, however, reporters appear to be in a more powerful position due to their extensive experiences in reporting news and addressing questions to speakers. This entails that they have access to various resources and are professional in debates. This can be illustrated in the example (8).

Example (8)

```
 1   R1:   what do you say to Americans who are upset with you over the
 2         way you down played this crisis over the last couple of months
 3         (0.5) we have it very much under control in this country(0.2)
 4         the coronavirus is very much under control in the USA(0.1)It's
 5         going to disappear(0.5) It's like a miracle It will disappear
 6         March 4 we have a very small number of people in this country
 7         infected(0.1) March 10 we're prepared(0.1) we're doing a great
 8         job with it It will go away just stay calm(0.1) it will go
 9         away what [ do you say to Americans]

10   DT:            [    … it will go away  ]

11   R1:   believe that you got this wrong(0.1)

12   DT:   instead of asking a nasty, snarky question like that you
13         should ask a real question(0.2) and other than that I'm going
14         to go to somebody else(0.1) please go ahead Please
```

While the reporter questions the speaker in relation to the pandemic, the speaker accuses the reporter of asking a snarky question. Taking a turn first clearly shows that reporters are always in a powerful position simply because they design their questions based on being informed of the debated subject. On the other hand, the speaker may be in a less powerful position due to the lack of argumentative resources. When reporters 'go first', this does not mean that they are in a weaker position, while the speaker who 'goes second' is in a weaker position. Here, it is noticed that going first' or 'going second' does not suggest having more or less power. Being in a more powerful position entirely depends on the use of available argumentative resources thought out the interaction.

In a similar example, the speaker uses accusation as a mean of answer evasion which ultimately shows that the speaker is in a weaker position when going second because he relies on the use of accusations.

Example (9)

```
 1   R:    excuse me Mr. President

 2   DT:   That's enough

 3   R:    Mr. President if I may ask, on the Russia investigation are
 4         you concerned that you may have

 5   DT:   I'm not concerned about anything with Russia investigation
 6         because it's a hoax

 7   R:    Are you …

 8   DT:   That's enough Put down the mic

 9   R:    Mr. President are you worried about indictments coming down in
10         this investigation (2.3)

11   DT:   ((walks away from podium and then returns back))

12   R:    Mr. President

13   DT:   I'll tell you what CNN should be ashamed of itself having you
14         working for them You are a rude, terrible person You shouldn't
15         be working for CNN (1.1)Go ahead I think that's on you're a
16         very rude person The way you treat Sarah Huckabee is horrible
17         and the way you treat other people are horrible you shouldn't
18         treat people that way Go ahea(0.2) Go ahead, Peter

19   R2:   In Jim's defence I've travelled with him and watched him He's
20         a diligent reporter who busted

21   DT:   well I'm not a big fan of yours either

22   R2:   I understand
```

In line 13, the speaker produced an accusation of the reporter in response to the reporter's question concerning the indictments of the investigations. Instead of complying to the reporter's question, the speaker evaded answering the question, therefore, changed the scope of the argument. The analysis also reveals that the speaker lacks some argumentative resources. The speakers is always in an evaluative position as being subjective rather than being objective. This ultimately portrays being in a powerless position during the interaction.

6. Conclusion

This study looked at press conference debates in term of the opening sequence. The findings of the study revealed that in the initial sequence, journalists employ diverse approaches prior to posing questions. These approaches encompass expressing disagreements, utilizing reporting speech to convey criticism, and directly criticizing the speaker. The utilization of these strategies highlights their professionalism and knowledge regarding the subject matter being debated. The study has also revealed that the speaker frequently resorts to accusations to counter evasive responses, utilizing these tactics to shift the focus of the debate and bring it to a conclusion. This analysis highlights the tense and confrontational nature of press conference interactions. Additionally, it observes that the interaction lacks a substantial exploration of the initial topic, devolving into personal criticisms and allegations. Lastly, the speaker may display disapproval and detachment from the reporters.

During press conference debates, it becomes evident that reporters hold a position of greater influence, primarily attributable to their extensive background in news reporting and their ability to pose questions to the speakers. The act of taking a turn in press conference debates reveals that reporters consistently hold a position of power, as they construct their questions based on their knowledge of the subject being debated. Conversely, the speaker may find themselves in a less powerful position due to a lack of substantial argumentative resources. However, it is important to note that the notion of "going first" or "going second" does not inherently signify greater or lesser power. The extent of power primarily relies on the effective utilization of available argumentative resources throughout the interaction.

Authors contributions

Both authors, Dr. Alqatawna and Abu Quba were responsible for study design and revision. They were responsible for data collection and analysis. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. GRANT5,742.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

Copyrights

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