The evolution of institutional *genre*s in time
The case of the White House press briefings

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Abstract

Through a corpus-based analysis of lexico-grammatical and syntactic features, the present paper aims to explore the evolution of the White House press briefings as a *genre* from 1993 to 2009, brought about by such factors as technological developments and media market transformation.

Our analysis Embracing a diachronic perspective, our analysis aims at identifying the main features of the evolution of the briefings during the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations. A corpus including the about 4,000 briefings held from January 1993 to January 2009 has been collected to this purpose.

The present paper outlines the ways in which the corpus architecture helps in investigating the evolution of the *genre*, and presents some preliminary results, with particular reference to the evolution of phraseology within the briefings.

Introduction

Literature on *genre* analysis mainly focuses on the description of language use in the different professional and institutional domains (Bhatia 2004). Despite the different directions of the studies on *genre* (Bhatia 1993; Martin and Christie 1997; Swales 1990), a common orientation may be seen in their tendency to describe homogeneous concepts, such as communicative situation, register and function.

Nevertheless, *genre*-specific features are subject to changes due to the ongoing processes of internationalisation and globalisation (Candlin and Gotti 2004; Cortese and Duszak 2005; Crystal 1997). In particular, political and institutional communication *genre*s have been experiencing in-depth transformation in the last few decades, mainly due to evolutions in the media market, fuelled by technological developments and by the economic globalisation (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999).

Within the framework of a wider research project titled "Tension and change in English domain-specific *genre*s" funded by the Italian Ministry of Research, the present paper aims to outline, through a corpus-based analysis of lexico-grammatical and syntactic features (Baker 2006), in what ways White House press briefings as a *genre* have evolved in the last 16 years under the pressure of technological developments and of media market transformation.

White House press briefings are meetings between the White House press secretary and the press, held on an almost daily basis. They may be regarded as the main official channel of communication for the White House and therefore play a crucial role in the communication strategies on the world's most powerful institution (Kumar 2007).

Embracing a diachronic perspective, our analysis aims at identifying the main features of the evolution of the briefings as a *genre*, during the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations. A corpus (*DiaWHoB*) including all the briefings from January 1993 to January 2009, available on the American Presidency Project website[i], has been collected in order to carry out the analysis.

The corpus consists of about 4,000 briefings and is made up of more than 18 million words. The scope and size of a specialised corpus of this kind make it a powerful tool to investigate the evolution of the White House press briefing. In order to manage the data more efficiently, the corpus has been annotated by using XML mark-up, which incorporates information about individual speakers and their roles, date, briefing details and text structure.

The present research paper outlines the corpus structure and discusses the ways in which the corpus architecture helps in investigating the evolution of the *genre*, and also presents some preliminary results. In particular, it focuses on some examples of evolution in phraseology within the *genre* of briefings in order to support the hypothesis that a diachronic corpus-based investigation facilitates comparisons among different speakers thanks to the XML mark-up while providing interesting insight into the evolution of a *genre*.

1. White House press briefings as a *genre*

The daily press briefings that take place at the White House are one of the most important arenas of political communication today. During the briefings, the press secretary to the president meets reporters with the twofold goal of responding to reporters' demands for presidential news and, more importantly from the White House point of view, of setting the agenda for the day by making certain issues more salient than others, according to the priorities established by the administration.

In particular, we have chosen to focus on the White House press briefings held during the two terms of the Clinton and of the George W. Bush administration: a wide time span that ranges from January 1993 to the same month in 2009.

As reported by a number of presidency scholars (Perloff 1998; Han 2001; Kumar 2007), the importance of communications and media relations at the White House has been steadily growing throughout the 20th century, and nowadays "the president and the news media jointly occupy center stage" (Perloff 1998: 58). The advent of the new millennium has then brought with it the rise of the Internet as a primary source of information, especially for the young people, and the multiplication of cable television networks – both factors that have led to an unprecedented transformation in the news cycle, which is now active 24 hours a day and in which pieces of news tend to have a very short life (Kumar 2007: xxx-xxxi), with the risk of generating a situation where there is "an abundance of information but a lack of understanding of what it means" (Kumar 2007: 2-3).

Furthermore, since Clinton's presidency, press briefings are not only transcribed and made available on the White House website, but also filmed and broadcast live both on television and on the Internet. Partington (2003: 29) suggests that this decision was made in an attempt to circumvent the filter represented by the press and show the public the briefings for themselves. Some commentators point out that this recent evolution has transformed the briefings into "a political stage" where "a unique form of reality TV" takes place (Cooper and McKinnon 2005). Kumar (2007: 243) also observes that "televising the briefing influences not only the language people use but also the way they deport themselves and the messages they send". The televised briefing, according to Jim Kennedy, communications director for the White House Counsel's Office during the Clinton administration, resembles a duel, where the way questions are formulated is influenced by the need to get answers that, informative or not, sound interesting or even sensational on TV (quoted in Kumar 2007: 56).

The press briefings that took place at the White House during the Clinton and Bush eras are therefore likely to represent an interesting starting point for the exploration of the way discourse strategies evolved in such a transformed context.

2. Preliminary quantitative analysis: participants and utterances in DiaWhoB corpus

The XML mark-up, which incorporates information into the corpus as to the identity and role of individual speakers (e.g. Ari Fleischer, Condoleezza Rice, podium[ii], journalists…), as well as to the date in which the briefing was held and to the text structure (e.g. announcements and question and answers session) was added to the corpus by following the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) guidelines (Sperberg-McQueen and Burnard 2007). The corpus was indexed and explored by using the *Xaira* corpus processing tool (OUCS 2006a, 2006b), which enabled us to generate a number of queries to obtain a list of participants across the four subcorpora, each containing all the briefings for individual Clinton's and Bush's terms as president. [iii]

The comparison across the four subcorpora, shown in Table 1, revealed the Clinton presidency briefings saw a much more significant presence of administration officials, while their role is significantly less evident during the Bush administration. Such a finding corresponds to what Kumar (2007: 80) reports with regard to the Bush administration:

> the president, not his staff or cabinet members, is the focus of presidential communications. […] An important result of the focus on presidential policy pronouncements is the rarity of having policy specialists use the Briefing room to provide background information on policy in a televised session, That represents a substantial change from earlier administrations.

Presidential terms	Other participants
Clinton I	65
Clinton II	48
Bush I	25
Bush II	30

Table 1. Number of participants other than podium and journalists

In order to obtain further insight into the significance of the presence of different speaker roles throughout the corpus, we compared the number of utterances between podium, journalists and a range of other participants across the four presidential terms. The distribution of their utterances is shown in Table 2. Starting from the first term, the number of participants other than the podium and journalists and of their utterances gradually decreases from Clinton's first term to Bush's second term, although it slightly grows in the last term. What is more interesting is the difference between the two presidential phases, since in Bush's first and second terms the number of participants other than podium and journalists is considerably lower than during Clinton administration.

The number of utterances for journalists and podium, on the other hand, remains relatively stable throughout the corpus. The number of utterances for the podium decreases in Bush's first term, but slightly grows in the second term. In Clinton's data, the number of podium's utterances is quite stable in the two terms, while the journalists' utterances are reduced from the first to the second phase.

Terms	Number of utterances		
	Podium	Other participants	Journalists
Clinton First	47118	10380	58928
Clinton Second	46569	5163	50424
Bush First	37431	2015	39388
Bush Second	38321	3631	40527

Table 2. Number of utterances per participant

Although this preliminary outline of the our data shows considerable differences in terms of number of participants across the four subcorpora, less significant variation is reported as far as the number of their utterances is concerned. Therefore, further analysis – in terms of number of words and focus on phraseology – is needed in order to explore the communicative strategies adopted by the podium and to identify the evolution of the briefings as a *genre*.

3. Methodology: looking at language from a phraseological perspective

Grammatical and lexical phenomena are totally interdependent and a large amount of language occurs in more or less fixed form. Since text is nothing but phraseology of one kind or another (Sinclair 2005), our aim in this research is to uncover recurrent clusters in this type of *genre* to look at their diachronic variation and the variables determining it.

Over the last 20 years there has been a growing interest in identifying the textual profile of a text by looking at its phraseology. In the late 1960s Hymes (1968: 126) tried to point out that a "vast proportion of verbal behaviour […] consists of recurrent patterns of linguistic routines" but there was no means of proving that it was more than a marginal phenomenon. Only with the empirical support coming from corpus studies the phenomenon of prefabricated language became evident and this resulted in a plethora of terms which define the language block-like character (e.g. 'lexical bundles' in Biber 1999). In this research the term 'phraseology' is mainly used in Clear's terms of "recurrent co-occurrence of words" (1993: 277), which refers to the more-or-less fixed co-occurrences of linguistic elements. Drawing on this perspective, multi-word units represent the norm in language and the primary carrier of meaning is not the single word but the phrase. In this approach, collocation becomes the way of understanding meanings and associations between words. Relying on a piece of software such as *WordSmith Tools* (Scott 2007), these contiguous combinations of words are here referred to as 'clusters'. It is important to highlight that what we obtain with the n-word cluster utility is just a repetition of strings of language, among which only some will be relatively fixed phrases (e.g. *that is why*). In other words, a cluster is "a group of words which follow each other in a text" (Scott & Tribble 2006-6: 204).

The choice of this approach is based on the assumption that the repetition of strings of words may be considered an indicator its functional relevance (cf. Mahlberg 2007).

The analysis is based on two steps: the first implies the retrieval of 4-word clusters for each presidential term which were compared and contrasted with 4-word clusters from the whole corpus, considered as 'reference corpus'. The choice of the cut-off point of four is arbitrary although it should be born in mind that what is found analysing 3-word clusters should be similar to longer strings of language.

The utility used in the second step is known as 'keywords', namely the 'screwdriver' in Scott & Tribble's metaphor (2006). More specifically, "keywords" are calculated by comparing the frequency of each cluster list of each year with the frequency of the cluster list in the reference corpus. The whole corpus thus functions as a reference corpus for the different years. The keyword lists suggest lexical items, which warrant further investigation because it is a measure of *saliency* (Baker 2006: 125) or to put it differently they represent 'importance' and 'aboutness' in textuality (Scott 2001). What we aim to demonstrate from a methodological point of view is that keywords can be revealing for identifying specificity of this particular *genre*.

4. Key-clusters analysis

Once the key-cluster list was retrieved, all clusters which were related to the political context, (such as *weapons of mass destruction; war on terror*) were counted out, since they did

not tell much about the communicative strategies of the podium. The resulting key-cluster lists, including the twenty most significant clusters, for Clinton's and Bush's presidencies are displayed in Table 3 and Table 4 respectively[iv].

What emerged from the observation of the other clusters was a strong prevalence of negative constructions in Clinton's terms such as *I don't believe*, *I don't know*, *not that I know*, *not to my knowledge* compared to the other president's sub-corpus. Another interesting remark is concerned with the marked presence of the podium, which is explicitly marked by the use of the first person singular pronoun, together with an outstanding frequency of mental verbs in Clinton's key-cluster list rather than in Bush's sub-corpus.

Clinton's first term				Clinton's second term			
Rank	Key word	Freq.	Keyness	Rank	Key word	Freq.	Keyness
1	I don't believe	568	160	1	I think the president	1336	207
2	I don't know	3446	153	2	I'm not aware	760	161
3	I'll have to	447	117	4	m not aware that	282	107
7	not that I know	172	87	6	that I m aware	379	85
9	There's been no	177	78	7	don t know that	690	83
10	that I know of	196	77	8	I'm aware of	403	76
11	we'll have to	365	67	9	I think there is	275	73
13	not to my knowledge	151	64	10	I think if you	338	70
15	can't comment on	143	62	11	I think we have	257	68
16	I wouldn't rule	147	62	14	not aware of any	338	65
18	are you going to	454	62	15	not that I'm	276	65
19	been no change in	93	58	16	with respect to the	285	60
21	with regards to the	82	56	17	those of you who	242	60
22	I think we'll	265	56	18	president and the first	164	59
23	have to take that	94	56	19	m not aware of	432	59
24	I just don't	289	55	20	think if you look	178	56
25	ll have to wait	107	55	23	I don't know	3237	53
26	s been no change	81	54	25	in a position to	395	52
27	t rule it out	99	54	26	from time to time	286	51
29	we don't have	467	52	27	think the president believes	111	50

Table 3. Key-clusters for Clinton's presidencies

The other striking feature of the clusters of the Bush's presidencies is the absence of the first person singular pronoun, which, especially in the first term is replaced by clusters showing the President's material processes, *the president will continue*, *the president is very*, and more significantly the President's mental processes, *the President believes that*, *the President thinks it*, *the President intends to*. The emphasis on the President's *actions* and *thoughts* fades throughout the two terms hinting at a change in the communicative strategy enacted by the podium, a change of strategy which is marked by wide use of clusters that have a discourse organising and emphasising function, such *as when it comes to*, *to make sure that*, *in terms of*, *that's why we*, *that's what we*.

Bush's first term				Bush's second term			
Rank	Key word	Freq.	Keyness	Rank	Key word	Freq.	Keyness
3	to make certain that	406	417	1	when it comes to	1149	371
5	and that's why	993	334	4	to make sure that	1598	301
6	as a result of	804	292	5	to be able to	1068	285
9	and the president is	499	221	6	one of the things	929	225
10	the president believes that	527	212	7	to move forward on	546	203

12	that's why I	375	191	8	the president and Mrs	332	167
13	to take your questions	271	186	9	but on the other	258	165
15	with that I'm	198	181	10	on the other hand	416	153
16	happy to take your	218	178	12	and that's what	970	150
18	that's why the	466	169	13	in terms of the	1030	149
19	the president will continue	273	165	14	take a look at	697	148
20	a result of the	374	165	15	that's why we	558	143
21	the president looks forward	349	163	16	that's what we	679	137
22	the president thinks it	172	163	17	to do is to	356	131
24	the president's focus	174	160	18	you take a look	316	128
26	president looks forward to	343	158	19	what's going on	523	127
27	m happy to take	176	154	21	if you take a	235	118
28	the president is very	296	152	22	make sure that we	483	118
29	the president intends to	204	149	24	a couple of things	301	111
30	president will continue to	243	147	25	as they move forward	186	110

Table 4. Key-clusters for Bush's presidencies

For the purpose of this paper we decided to focus on two clusters only, *I don't believe* and *that's why*, which were found to be significantly frequent in Clinton's and Bush's sub corpora, in order to investigate the evolution of their usage and their potential strategic meaning in our texts.

4.1.1 *I don't believe* cluster in the Clinton administration

In the present section we take into account the 4-word cluster *I don't believe* and some observations are drawn. The distribution of the cluster is displayed in the following table:

Participants	First term				Second term			
	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Podium	226	44	123	106	102	82	47	47

Table 5. 4-word cluster *I don't believe*

Considering the colligation of this cluster, as concerned with the distribution in the sentence (Hoey 1993) this cluster has found to have a colligational preference for sentence initial position.

The second observation, with reference to the Podium, is that, in the first *Clinton* administration over 100 hundred random occurrences, the 4-word cluster collocates with *so*. Reference to the anaphora function turns out to be quite straightforward, *so* is the 'hook' between the podium and the other speaker, however, only in one occasion it is slightly hedged as suggested in the following example: *I don't believe so, but I'll double-check and make sure that he did not.*

Quoting Hyland (1998: 1): *hedging* refers to any linguistic means used to indicate either a) a lack of complete commitment to the truth value of an accompanying proposition, or b) a desire not to express that commitment categorically. The podium withholds full commitment to his statement, as suggested by Hyland (1998) using the "reader-oriented hedges" that address the social interactions between writer and reader. Writers and speakers, in general, tend to protect their reputation; for example, criticism is often diffuse and does not attribute what is criticized to any particular source, hedges enable writers to manage disagreement without creating open conflict.

With reference to journalists as participant, in the first *Clinton* administration over 100 hundred random occurrences, the 4 word cluster *I don't believe* does not present any recurrent

colligations nor collocations, presumably because it occurs not very often as displayed in the following table:

Participants	First Term				Second Term			
	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Journalists	2	5	2	3	1	1	2	0

Table 6. the 4 word cluster *I don't believe* in the Clinton administration

Taking into account as participant the journalists, in the first Clinton administration no striking patterns are observed; however, some observations may be drawn. In particular, what is relevant is no specific collocations neither colligation but different linguistic phenomena are conveyed.

In details, hedging is quite recurrent as displayed in the following fragments:

1) The President said the real solution is campaign finance reform, but as he's laid out his ideas that he wants to talk about in the next term *I don't believe* he's talked about campaign finance publicly. Is he going to -- I would not rule out the possibility. He might actually address that issue in the coming days.

2) Well, that's true, but we haven't heard the President explain since subordinate officials have begun saying that a force will land. *I don't believe* we've heard the President on the subject of why a force will land yet. Again, I think the President has talked consistently about what our interests are.

In the former excerpt, the 4-word cluster *I don't believe* is followed by the sentence *he's talked about campaign finance publicly.* This sentence *per se* refers to a thorny issue, however, hedging is substantially expressed by the following utterance *I would not rule out the possibility*, the modalised expression, in a certain way, mitigates the previous utterance.

In the latter extract the 4-word cluster *I don't believe* is followed by the sentence *we've heard the President on the subject*, in this example we need to focus on the subject clearly related to the military field. Here hedging is less evident but still present.

Similarly, other feelings are displayed like a serious concern displayed in the following extract:

3) On the first question, it is binding on the President. I mean, this is -- But he can issue a report saying I choose to ignore it, *I don't believe* we should put people through this pain, I don't want to -- There is a provision that says that he can make the statement that this is not binding.

In the example above, what is relevant is the modal *should* and the word *pain* that immediately follow the cluster and the sentence *we should put people through* building an anxious scenario.

Another feeling, connected with irony, is displayed in the following excerpt:

4) And our bottom line has always been we want to see a system in place that gets us to 100 percent coverage. *I don't believe* anybody's claimed that the so called moderate group would be coming forward with a bill that will get you to universal coverage. Isn't it your understanding that the bill would fall somewhat less than universal coverage?

In the extract above, the cluster *I don't believe* introduces a sort of irony, where the message is based on an ambiguous assumption. Generally, 'Verbal' irony is defined as a strategic incongruity or dissimulation between different levels of meaning (Giora, 1995; Ivanko & Pexman, 2003). Unlike the traditional "oppositional view" of irony (see Grice, 1975), where irony is seen as a figure of speech that conveys the opposite of its literal meaning, the view adopted here is that irony does not cancel out the indirectly negated message or necessarily implicate the opposite meaning of the negated message (Clift, 1999; Giora, 1995). Rather,

ironic statements keep both the explicit and implicated messages in play so that the dissimilarity between them can be rhetorically honed for interactive purposes.

Irony thus achieves a kind of hedging that pivots on multiple levels on meaning, a pivoting that suggests that the very stability and adaptability of communication may very well lie in its ability to be strategically ironised.

4.1.2 *I don't believe* in Bush Administration

Out a total of 54 occurrences of "I don't believe" phrase in the first term of Bush administration, (podium utterances), about 44 occurrences showed disagreement with respect to the journalists' questions, followed by the actual answer and/ or reformulations, while in 10 hits the cluster was used to provide an answer, without any further explanation. Some examples about the podium disagreement with the journalists' questions are shown below:

5)   Fleischer (podium) Oh, it's by definition. *I don't believe* the letter had a duration attached to it. It asked for the administration's assistance in expediting permitting by all appropriate federal agencies.
6)   Mcclellan (podium) *I don't believe* I specifically did. I mean, but, obviously, we're talking about private sector growth.
7)   Fleischer (podium) No, *I don't believe* that's the case; not even close. I think what you've seen is a strong message from President Bush.

In the second term of Bush administration the cluster occurred much more frequently (164). Although the analysis of 100 sample hits did not show any significant differences from Clinton's data, an interesting presence of markers of subjectivity and hedging (right collocates) emerged when an answer was provided. For example, *think* occurred after the cluster, signalling the podium's viewpoints, along with a range of heteroglossic markers, such as *but simply*, *yet*, *probably*, which generally open up or close down the space for alternative positions in texts. To summarize, the analysis of the concordances showed that in the second term of Bush Presidency, *I don't believe* was used by the podium mainly to recall a previous question and express opinions, comments rather than providing the journalists with an answer.

4.2 That's why

In this part of our research, we are concerned with those formulations that construe a particular type of consequentiality (White 2003: 274). The cluster *that's why* can be seen as a 'connective' and labelled in White and Martin's terminology (2003) as 'justification'. As the two researchers maintain, it works dialogically because it represents the textual voice, in our case the podium and less frequently the journalist, as taking an 'argumentative position'.

There are 4724 hits of the cluster 'that's why' in the whole corpus. As it can be observed from the bar chart, the cluster characterizes Bush's term reaching its peak in 2005 to decrease in the following years.

If we consider the instances of this cluster for each participant, namely the podium and the journalists (see table 7), we notice that the percentage of the occurrences is very high in the podium and the frequency increases until Bush's second term, where only 3% of the instances belong to the journalists. This might suggest that the podium does not leave too much time for further questions since s/he prefers to discuss all the aspects by emphasizing and signalling relevant issues. A look at the collocational profile and concordances may support this point.

As far as the journalists are concerned, keeping in mind a lower frequency of the cluster in Bush's term, we can safely state that the main usage implies clarification, as shown in the following examples:

8) *That's why* I'm asking you
9) *That's why* some of these questions are coming up
10) You say the President has done paperwork on either way, and *that's why* the WH can execute it?

The collocational profile of the cluster in both presidents is shown in the following table (2) and the collocates have been calculated relying on the z-score and keeping a span of 4 words in the left and right co-text:
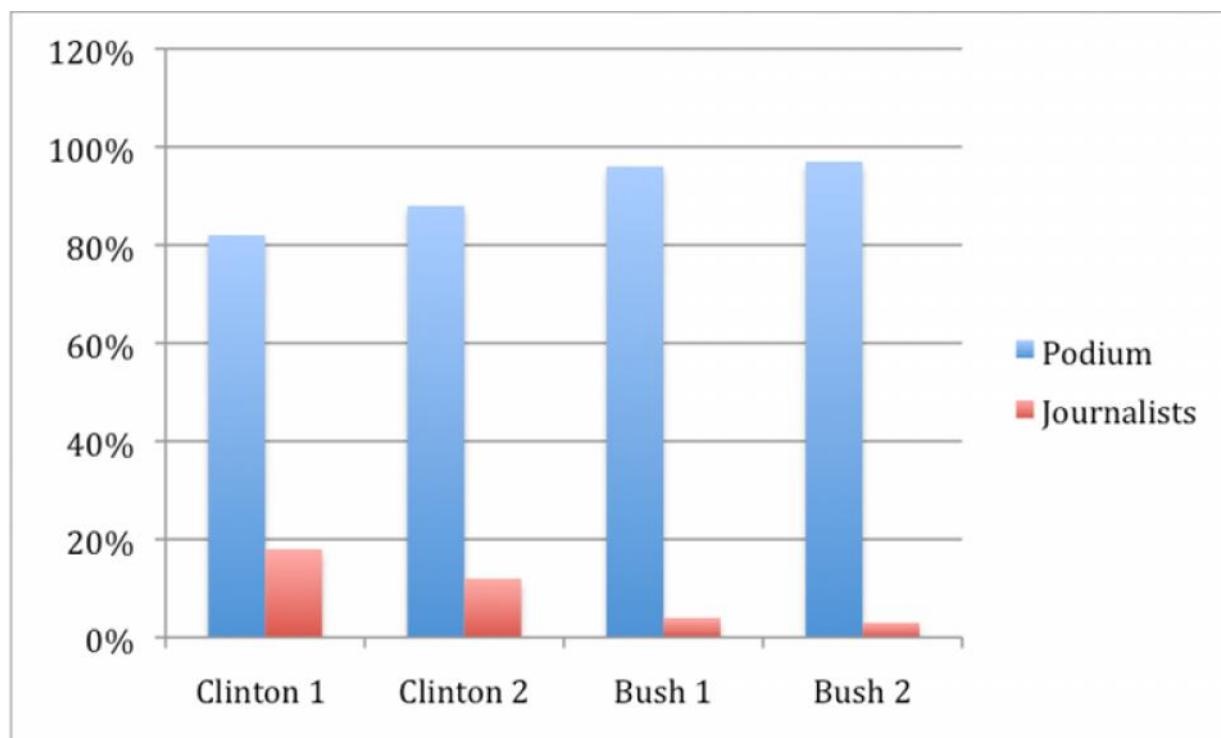
Table 7. Frequency of *that's why* in the different terms in both participants

Clinton's first term		Clinton's second term		Bush's first term		Bush's second term	
chose	18.5	we've	13.4	and	40.9	outlined	40.6
he's	16.4	and	13.4	pointed	32.7	and	35.6
Guantanamo	16.	chose	12.5	.	29.4	important	34.2
we're	15.7	.	11.7	said	27.4	pointed	31.0
opened	15.6	thwarted	11.6	president	26.3	.	29.6
fought	13.9	pursued	11.6	partnering	20.0	selected	28.0
pressing	13.7	oceans	11.5	I	18.9	we're	27.1
.	13.7	teeth	11.5	important	18.3	we	24.9
shell	12.1	counsels	11.5	supports	17.4	act	23.5
frustrations	11.8	ambiguity	11.0	indicated	15.6	president	22.6

Table 8. Collocates of *that's why* based on z-score (*Xaira*)

The table shows that there is much more variation in Clinton rather than in Bush where particular importance is given to the use of the conjunction 'and' in initial position, to the noun 'president' and the very frequent adjective 'important'.

The main function of the cluster in both presidencies is that of explanation of the strategies chosen, but in the Bush sub-corpus the presence of 'and' implies the effort from the podium of making further comments on the issues discussed sometimes just to repeat the same formulation:

11) It's important to say that's why I said it

Or to highlight the importance of what said.

In most of the instances of and that's why many positive evaluative adjectives were found in the right context (such as pleased; proud; determined) which tend to set up judgements and feelings more than facts.

Conclusions

This preliminary investigation of the evolution of the *genre* White House Press briefing through an analysis of key-clusters has highlighted the remarkable variation in the usage of specific clusters which characterise the language used by the podium. In particular this study has shown how Clinton's first term is marked by the explicit presence of the Press Secretary in the interaction with the press, as the large number of occurrences of the first person singular pronoun clearly shows. Through the comparison of the key-cluster lists another feature of the Clinton Administration Briefing emerges: the widespread use of clusters containing negations. The analysis of the cluster *I don't believe* has underlined how the podium uses the cluster to negotiate meaning in the interaction with the press often exploiting an ironic effect. The clusters of the first term by George W. Bush seem to point to an explicit communicative strategy aimed at highlighting the role of the President only, which was also suggested by the relatively small number of Administration Officials taking an active role in the Briefings. The key-cluster list for the second term confirms and reinforces a trend already visible in the previous term: the need to make sure the communication is effectively reaching the press, as exemplified by the analysis of the cluster *that's why*. What this study has not proven yet is whether the variability within the use of clusters that may be linked to an argumentative function is part of an evolution of the *genre*, due to greater importance that this very specific communicative event, or is the result of specific political agendas and their relative communicative strategies. A further and more detailed investigation is needed to corroborate our preliminary findings and to interpret the data within the specific communicative context in which the White House Press Briefings take place.

Appendix 1

	Clinton's first term			Clinton's second term		
Rank	Key word	Freq.	Keyness	Key word	Freq.	Keyness
1	I don't believe	568	160	I think the president	1336	207
2	I don't know	3446	153	I m not aware	760	161
3	I'll have to	447	117	the social security surplus	164	114
4	the partnership for peace	144	94	m not aware that	282	107
5	to balance the budget	163	92	social security and medicare	152	94
6	the chief of staff	264	92	that I m aware	379	85
7	not that I know	172	87	don't know that	690	83
8	lifting the arms embargo	102	87	I m aware of	403	76
9	there's been no	177	78	I think there is	275	73
10	that I know of	196	77	I think if you	338	70
11	we'll have to	365	67	I think we have	257	68
12	of a balanced budget	101	65	and the first lady	204	68
13	not to my knowledge	151	64	the balanced budget agreement	86	67
14	the course of the	401	63	not aware of any	338	65
15	can't comment on	143	62	not that I m	276	65
16	I wouldn't rule	147	62	with respect to the	285	60
17	billion in deficit reduction	73	62	those of you who	242	60
18	are you going to	454	62	president and the first	164	59

19	been no change in	93	58	m not aware of	432	59
20	of health care reform	69	58	think if you look	178	56
21	with regards to the	82	56	the last seven years	78	55
22	I think we'll	265	56	paying down the debt	73	54
23	have to take that	94	56	I don't know	3237	53
24	I just don't	289	55	Joe does the president	66	53
25	ll have to wait	107	55	in a position to	395	52
26	s been no change	81	54	from time to time	286	51
27	t rule it out	99	54	think the president believes	111	50
28	long term interest rates	79	52	ll let you know	321	49
29	we don't have	467	52	pay down the debt	74	49
30	have to wait and	123	51	I think as we	88	47
31	broad based energy tax	60	51	Joe is the president	57	46
32	decisions have been made	93	50	with prime minister Barak	58	45
33	I don't think	2026	48	going to speculate on	117	44
34	don't know whether	244	48	think there is a	145	44
35	ll have to take	107	48	I think as the	103	44
36	wouldn't rule it	79	47	know the answer to	218	43
37	gays in the military	61	47	I think as I	90	43
38	continue to press for	73	47	patients bill of rights	201	42
39	I can't comment	118	47	as far as the	304	42
40	more to say about	111	47	social security trust fund	68	42
41	don't believe so	133	47	think as the president	75	42
42	to wait and see	145	47	the comprehensive test ban	72	42
43	the white house staff	158	46	medicare and social security	71	42
44	a great deal of	287	46	the government of Iraq	116	41
45	goal of a balanced	56	46	t know the answer	225	41
46	don't know that	604	46	the first lady s	125	40
47	the president's package	65	45	the social security trust	65	40
48	In the process of	255	45	Joe has the president	50	40
49	ll have to check	180	45	the end of the	685	40
50	the Cuban democracy act	60	44	over the last seven	58	40
51	health care task force	54	44	earned income tax credit	124	40
52	it's something that	276	43	had a chance to	250	39
53	of the health care	77	43	and I think the	490	39
54	on the crime bill	50	42	secretary of state Albright	48	39
55	class bill of rights	52	42	the Asian financial crisis	49	39
56	middle class bill of	52	42	the work that we	96	38
57	the national performance review	53	42	the president's lawyers	54	38
58	the war powers act	56	42	the first lady will	77	37
59	don't have a	400	42	ways in which we	106	37
60	ll have to get	91	42	before the grand jury	54	37
61	at a number of	88	42	some of the things	217	37
62	afternoon ladies and gentlemen	100	41	into the social security	54	36
63	good afternoon ladies and	100	41	it's certainly our	50	36
64	president's going to	117	41	comprehensive test ban treaty	67	36
65	just don't have	115	41	Joe do you have	44	35
66	seven year balanced budget	48	41	with the Russian federation	82	35
67	with prime minister major	49	41	I haven't heard	262	35
68	the no fly zone	82	41	I think there are	249	34
69	other than to say	96	40	the answer to that	243	34
70	health care reform and	47	40	percent of the surplus	42	34

71	I believe it s	131	39	can tell you more	75	34
72	the president's going	116	39	to make the case	104	34
73	the health care task	48	39	in which we can	102	33
74	a number of options	73	38	to pay down the	46	33
75	the health care plan	52	38	but I think the	246	33
76	we'll continue to	355	38	In the best interest	101	32
77	on health care reform	44	37	the president's national	79	32
78	I think he's	299	37	the way in which	133	32
79	a broad based energy	43	37	but I don't	615	32
80	wait and see what	109	36	but as far as	85	32
81	have to get back	82	36	so I don't	395	32
82	get back to you	209	35	if I understand correctly	53	32
83	during the course of	188	35	t know that we	138	32
84	a number of things	154	35	t think there is	66	32
85	t know the answer	210	35	the office of independent	39	31
86	of the arms embargo	43	35	I m not familiar	141	31
87	brothers to the rescue	44	35	white house legal counsel	97	31
88	secretary of state Christopher	45	35	I have no reason	67	31
89	the conflict in Bosnia	40	34	the earned income tax	102	31
90	budget in seven years	40	34	by the government of	84	31
91	in the travel office	42	34	don't have any	495	31
92	the president's economic	93	33	Joe what's the	38	31
93	Dee Dee can you	39	33	the president and the	579	30
94	lift the arms embargo	39	33	office of independent counsel	37	30
95	get on with the	65	33	Joe is there any	37	30
96	In the white house	414	33	long term social security	37	30
97	secretary of the treasury	114	33	think it would be	182	30
98	on the house side	59	33	s certainly our hope	39	30
99	the former soviet union	68	33	not aware that there	70	29
100	Dee Dee do you	38	32	don't know whether	226	29

Table 1. Key-clusters for Clinton's presidencies

	Bush's first term			Bush's second term		
Rank	Key word	Freq.	Keyness	Key word	Freq.	Keyness
1	weapons of mass destruction	957	771	when it comes to	1149	371
2	the war on terrorism	890	619	the six party talks	470	366
3	to make certain that	406	417	the war on terror	587	354
4	in the middle east	700	340	to make sure that	1598	301
5	and that's why	993	334	to be able to	1068	285
6	as a result of	804	292	one of the things	929	225
7	united nations security council	341	248	to move forward on	546	203
8	the united nations security	299	225	the president and Mrs	332	167
9	and the president is	499	221	but on the other	258	165
10	the president believes that	527	212	on the other hand	416	153
11	to the Iraqi people	221	205	in the war on	445	151
12	that's why I	375	191	and that's what	970	150
13	to take your questions	271	186	in terms of the	1030	149
14	president intends to nominate	169	183	take a look at	697	148
15	with that I m	198	181	that's why we	558	143
16	happy to take your	218	178	that's what we	679	137
17	the department of justice	405	175	to do is to	356	131
18	that's why the	466	169	you take a look	316	128

19	the president will continue	273	165	what's going on	523	127
20	a result of the	374	165	conditions on the ground	154	123
21	the president looks forward	349	163	if you take a	235	118
22	the president thinks it	172	163	make sure that we	483	118
23	a free and peaceful	167	161	the global war on	192	111
24	the president's focus	174	160	a couple of things	301	111
25	for the Iraqi people	205	158	as they move forward	186	110
26	president looks forward to	343	158	to the six party	130	107
27	m happy to take	176	154	are going to be	741	104
28	the president is very	296	152	the president talked about	364	101
29	the president intends to	204	149	I m going to	740	99
30	president will continue to	243	147	we want to see	267	95
31	the president's day	195	146	and that's why	883	94
32	to the united nations	241	146	put it this way	164	92
33	the iraq survey group	137	144	you re going to	781	91
34	of weapons of mass	195	138	problems facing social security	107	90
35	protect the American people	225	133	of the six party	113	89
36	that I m happy	137	133	global war on terror	114	89
37	war on terrorism and	222	133	commanders on the ground	154	89
38	the united states is	472	130	war on terror and	140	86
39	the war against terrorism	121	128	me put it this	140	86
40	s why the president	338	124	you ve got to	300	84
41	of the Iraqi people	156	124	and in terms of	210	84
42	the coalition provisional authority	109	121	director of national intelligence	107	83
43	the president has said	543	119	Glad to go to	119	82
44	president thinks it s	128	119	the Iraqi security forces	125	82
45	president is going to	609	115	our children and grandchildren	107	81
46	the president is going	611	115	is going to be	1013	79
47	the president is focused	158	114	on our way to	110	79
48	s why I said	142	112	the broader middle east	125	77
49	the president's opinion	113	111	a matter of fact	194	77
50	in the war on	342	110	want to make sure	357	76
51	in the president s	432	107	going to have to	625	76
52	I m happy to	196	107	trying to do is	188	76
53	and with that I	229	106	move forward on the	229	74
54	to disarm Saddam Hussein	94	104	going to be able	294	73
55	patients bill of rights	217	104	my question does the	116	73
56	the president thinks that	159	104	Sure that we re	152	72
57	the president is pleased	121	103	we re working to	176	72
58	winning the war on	158	102	prevent attacks from happening	114	72
59	the united states will	242	102	the Iraq study group	85	71
60	it's important to	521	102	and my question does	113	71
61	the president hopes that	125	101	to go to your	100	70
62	the president's judgment	99	100	in the six party	88	69
63	president's focus is	104	100	of the things that	562	68
64	president is very pleased	99	99	you re talking about	516	68
65	peace in the middle	144	98	make sure that the	306	68
66	and the president will	355	96	you ve got a	214	68
67	had his usual briefings	107	96	people in the region	116	68
68	president is focused on	142	96	had his normal briefings	80	67
69	president's point of	113	96	it's going to	719	67
70	does the president believe	293	96	a look at the	268	67

71	help the Iraqi people	120	95	re going to have	589	67
72	the president's point	131	95	with that I'll	140	66
73	department of homeland security	213	95	and so that s	204	66
74	given the fact that	195	95	s going to be	872	66
75	nations around the world	101	94	let me put it	149	65
76	wants to make certain	85	93	nation's highest court	77	65
77	s point of view	133	93	Al Qaeda in Iraq	79	64
78	that's the president	138	93	to live in freedom	82	64
79	the president has made	441	93	go to your questions	105	64
80	convened a meeting of	83	92	I m not going	1405	64
81	as I indicated the	93	92	it's important that	385	64
82	make certain that the	88	92	on foreign sources of	118	63
83	take a look at	520	91	she is someone who	82	63
84	president had his usual	106	91	he is someone who	107	63
85	give you a report	84	90	it comes to the	224	62
86	of the united nations	197	90	with prime minister maliki	74	62
87	the department of defense	289	90	the director of national	78	62
88	the people of Iraq	129	89	m not going to	1387	62
89	made it very clear	329	88	about the importance of	446	61
90	on the road map	95	88	general petraeus and ambassador	73	61
91	fact of the matter	124	87	petraeus and ambassador crocker	73	61
92	to protect the American	162	87	and one of the	299	61
93	of mass destruction and	128	87	there's a lot	413	60
94	s what the president	255	87	the department of homeland	190	60
95	of the matter is	127	87	and women in uniform	105	59
96	will continue to work	231	87	global war on terrorism	149	59
97	to talk to the	250	87	president has talked about	174	59
98	afternoon the president will	111	86	they re going to	833	59
99	when you take a	91	86	I think what you	213	59
100	the president does not	171	86	how to move forward	112	58

Table 2. Key-clusters for Bush's presidencies

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Notes

[i] http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/press_briefings.php (last accessed on 29 September 2009)

[ii] We will henceforth use the word "podium" to refer to the White House press secretary, following Partington (2003).

[iii] The authors would like to thank Serena Soldo for the invaluable help in the mark-up process of the texts.

[iv] The key-cluster lists containing the one hundred most relevant keywords for each term can be found in Appendix 1.