

Magdalena Szczyrbak  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0182-0938>

Jagiellonian University in Kraków & University of Pardubice

Anna Tereszkievicz  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7553-0178>

Jagiellonian University in Kraków

Responding to Omicron: Speaker Commitment and Legitimation in COVID-related Press Conferences¹

Abstract

This paper examines the ways in which New Zealand and Polish government officials communicated the easing of COVID restrictions to the general public. The study aimed to identify legitimising strategies used to justify the lifting of restrictions and related measures, and to establish how agency and responsibility were discursively constructed in the subgenre of political press conference in two different socio-political settings. Informed by the notions of legitimisation (Chilton 2004), speaker commitment and stance (Marín Arrese 2011, 2015, 2021), the research looked into the linguistic marking of effective stance (deonticity, assessments, attitudinals and directives) and epistemic stance (epistemic modality, truth-factual validity as well as experiential, cognitive and communicative stance), considering both the subjectivity/intersubjectivity dimension and the explicitness/implicitness of the speaker's role. In addition, the study considered the key discursive strategies used to (de)construct agency in the discourses of NZ and Polish policymakers seen as proponents of divergent public health policies. As the findings indicate, the Polish officials conveyed chiefly experiential stance and projected less involvement, whereas the NZ Prime Minister favoured cognitive stance and deonticity as well as direct appeals to the audience. The analysis shows that the speaker's

¹ This research was funded by the programme Excellence Initiative – Research University at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

(dis)identification with the respective policy finds reflection in the varying degrees of speaker commitment and the (de)construction of agency.

Key words

legitimation, speaker commitment, stance, press conference, COVID restrictions

Abstrakt

Przedmiotem niniejszego opracowania jest analiza strategii obecnych w dyskursie konferencji prasowych, podczas których przedstawiciele rządu zakomunikowali oficjalne zniesienie obostrzeń pandemicznych w Nowej Zelandii i Polsce. Badanie miało na celu określenie strategii legitymizacji zniesienia restrykcji oraz związanych z nimi działań, a także ustalenie sposobu, w jaki przedstawiciele władz działający w różnych socjopolitycznych kontekstach tworzyli dyskursywny obraz sprawczości i odpowiedzialności w warunkach pandemii. W analizie odwołano się do konceptualizacji legitymizacji w dyskursie politycznym (Chilton 2004) oraz wykorzystano wcześniejsze ustalenia dotyczące zaangażowania epistemicznego oraz wyrażania postaw (Marín Arrese 2011, 2015, 2021). Zbadano językowe znaczniki postawy efektywnej (obejmującej modalność deontyczną, sądy dotyczące powinności/normatywności, sądy dotyczące wolitywności/intencjonalności i dyrektywy) oraz postawy epistemicznej (w tym wykładniki modalności epistemicznej, sądy prawdziwościowe, a także znaczniki odnoszące się do doświadczenia/percepcji, stanów mentalnych i aktów komunikacji). Uwzględniono przy tym stopień wyrazistości mówiącego (*explicitness vs implicitness*) oraz zróżnicowanie na sądy subiektywne i intersubiektywne. Celem analizy było ponadto określenie strategii służących (de)konstruowaniu dyskursywnego obrazu sprawczości w dyskursie polityków realizujących odmienne polityki dotyczące zdrowia publicznego w Nowej Zelandii i Polsce. Badanie pokazało, że przedstawiciele polskiego rządu najczęściej używali znaczników odnoszących się do doświadczenia/percepcji oraz że w ich dyskursie nieczęsto występowały elementy świadczące o dużym zaangażowaniu epistemicznym. W wypadku dyskursu premier rządu nowozelandzkiego odnotowano z kolei częste występowanie znaczników określających stany mentalne i wykładników deontycznych, a także bezpośrednich zwrotów do odbiorcy. Przeprowadzona analiza wskazuje na zależność między stopniem utożsamiania się mówców z głoszoną przez nich polityką, a stopniem zaangażowania epistemicznego i sposobami (de)konstruowania dyskursywnego obrazu sprawczości.

Słowa kluczowe

konferencja prasowa, legitymizacja, obostrzenia covidowe, wyrażanie postaw, zaangażowanie epistemiczne

1. Introduction²

The COVID-19 pandemic affected people's lives in unprecedented ways which were once unimaginable. Posing a serious public health threat, it necessitated the introduction of unpopular measures such as mask-wearing

² We wish to thank two anonymous reviewers whose insightful comments helped us to improve the original manuscript. All the remaining shortcomings and errors are ours.

and lockdowns, which substantially curbed personal freedoms and impacted many walks of life. With the emergence of a new social reality arose the need for government officials worldwide to publicly announce their response to the unfolding crisis, and to justify the imposition and subsequent lifting of restrictions.

Unsurprisingly, the new social reality has inspired a great deal of research into changing social behaviours and COVID-related communication practices. The discourse-analytic studies have looked, among other issues, into the construction of collectivity and leadership in press briefings (Jaworska 2021), use of digital humour to make sense of the pandemic, challenge power and create solidarity (Mpfu 2021), or the expression of ambiguity, responsibility and political action in daily COVID-19 briefings (Williams, Wright 2022). Along similar lines, various aspects of COVID-related communication in New Zealand and Poland – the two settings under scrutiny in the current study – have been addressed in several recent papers. For instance, in the New Zealand context, performative control, rhetoric and key imagery have been discussed by Gilray (2021), persuasion and leadership in action have been examined by Hafner and Sun (2021), and spatialised metaphors in socio-political discourse have been investigated by Kearns (2021). Polish scholars, on the other hand, have turned their attention *i.a.* to the metaphoricity of the discourse produced during the first wave of the pandemic (Brzeźniak 2020), scientification of Polish parliamentary discourse (Hoffmann 2022) and the construction of consensus and conflict in the public debate surrounding the nationwide pandemic strategy (Łotocki, Mikiński 2022).

None of the above studies, however, focuses on legitimisation in government officials' discourse produced during the Omicron wave in two geographically distant countries whose COVID-19 responses represented divergent public health policies. To enrich existing research into crisis communication – at the heart of which lies plausible rationalization and effective legitimisation – the current study looks at the discourse of New Zealand and Polish press conferences during which the easing of COVID-related measures was announced to the general public. The lifting of restrictions, just like their imposition, required plausible rationalization, and as such, it deserves analytical attention. For this reason, this paper centres on legitimising strategies which aimed to justify the lifting of restrictions alongside related measures, and, further, it explains how agency and responsibility were discursively constructed in two genre-matched, though distinct, communicative settings. More specifically, building on the concepts of epistemic and deontic legitimisation (Chilton 2004) as well as stance and inter/subjectivity (Marín Arrese 2011, 2015, 2021), the study examines the linguistic marking of effective and epistemic stance in the discourses of one health minister and two prime ministers seen as proponents of dissimilar public health policies.

Within the two macro-categories of stance, several categories of markers are examined, including: deontic markers, assessments, attitudinals and directives as well as markers of epistemic modality, truth-factual validity, and experiential, cognitive and communicative stance. Added to this are the distinctions into subjective and intersubjective positioning, on the one hand, and the explicitness vs implicitness of the conceptualiser's role, on the other. The analysis also considers key discursive strategies pursued by the speakers to claim responsibility for the actions taken or, conversely, to de-emphasize agency. As the two stages of the analysis indicate, the officials' (dis)identification with the respective policy finds reflection in the varying degrees of speaker commitment and the discursal (de)construction of responsibility, both in the New Zealand and the Polish corpus.

2. Stance and speaker commitment

Stance may be regarded as a cognitive and philosophical construct, or as an interactional phenomenon which organises communication and which is unavoidably linked to the expression of *subject* or *self* in the exercise of language, that is linguistic subjectivity (Benveniste 1971: 226). It is the speaker's point of view, or origo of viewing, that determines the choice of stance markers conveying the speaker's "personal feelings, attitudes, value judgments, or assessments" (Biber et al. 1999: 972) and that translates into varying degrees of speaker commitment. The latter, in turn, is often linked to how speakers assess and qualify the information they share, as well as its source and perceived reliability. Speakers may also choose to expressly refrain from assigning any validity to the information, that is to disclaim responsibility and to convey non-commitment or aphony (Brandt 2004: 7 as cited in Marín Arrese 2009: 238).

Subjectivity and stance-related phenomena have been discussed under various labels and across diverse contexts and genres.³ Given the purpose of the current study, in what follows, the model proposed by Marín Arrese (2011, 2015, 2021), successfully applied in earlier work on legitimisation, will receive a more thorough treatment. The framework enables one to show how speakers express their stances to support or justify their assertions, with a view to affecting the hearers' acceptance of the truth or validity of the information. In this approach, inspired by Langacker's (2009) distinction into the effective and epistemic level, "[e]pistemic relations are those which hold at the level of knowledge, and thus involve conceptions

³ For an overview of studies into stance-taking practices in discourse, see e.g. Englebretson (2007).

of reality”, while “effective relations hold at the level of reality itself” (Langacker 2009: 291). Accordingly, the stances speakers take to legitimise their actions may be divided into effective stance and epistemic stance, both of which, as argued by Marín Arrese (2011), may index varying degrees of the explicitness or implicitness of the conceptualiser, as well as signal personal responsibility (i.e. subjectivity) or opaque/shared responsibility (i.e. intersubjectivity) for the information.

Effective stance, subsuming deontic markers, assessments, attitudinals and directives, concerns the ways in which the speaker “tries to exert control or influence on the course of reality itself” (Marín Arrese 2011: 193). Epistemic stance, on the other hand, pertains to the speaker’s “stancetaking acts concerning knowledge about the events designated” (Marín Arrese 2011: 193) and comprises markers of epistemic modality, truth-factual validity, experiential stance, cognitive stance and communicative stance. So conceived, epistemicity reflects the speaker’s “knowledge or belief vis-à-vis some focus of concern, including degrees of certainty of knowledge, degrees of commitment to the truth of propositions and sources of knowledge, among other epistemic qualities” (Ochs 1996: 410).⁴ Thus, as noted by Marín Arrese (2015: 302), “[e]pistemic stance resources realize the indirect legitimisation strategy of providing epistemic justificatory support, knowledge and information, for the speaker’s proposed conception of reality, while effective stance resources provide a more direct strategy of urging for action by claiming the necessity, desirability, righteousness or feasibility of the proposed plans of action, or the speaker’s commitment towards those proposed actions”.

It is also important to reiterate that both effective and epistemic stance resources index the speaker’s subjective or intersubjective positioning, as well as point to the salience of the conceptualiser and, as a result, the extent of their commitment to the validity of the communicated information. In the words of Marín Arrese (2011: 213), “[t]he speaker, as ground element, serves the role of subject of conception and source of the predication, but may also become an object of conception as a participant within the predication”. In expressions with personal predicates (e.g. *I think, I see*), the speaker is explicitly mentioned and as such, s/he serves the role of conceptualiser and is part of the conceptualisation. In the case of modals (e.g. *may, should*), on the other hand, the speaker’s role is less explicit; still, the conceptualiser functions as an implicit source of reference (Marín Arrese 2011: 213). As far as modal adverbs are concerned (e.g. *of course, probably*), the conceptualiser is

⁴ Epistemic meaning has been approached from various angles and its relation to evidentiality, i.e. one’s access to information source, has been variously defined (see e.g. Dendale, Tasmowski 2001). According to the view held by Marín Arrese (2015, 2021), informed by Boye’s (2012) functional-cognitive account, the conceptual domain of epistemicity, or “justificatory support”, subsumes epistemic modality and evidentiality.

identified with the actual speaker, and in the case of perceptual and cognitive markers (e.g. *it seems*, *that means*), the conceptualiser may be “only potential” or may be “construed generically or in a generalized fashion” (Langacker 2000: 350).

Considering the above, the dimension of subjectivity may be thought of in terms of the “degree of salience or overtness of the role of the conceptualiser” (Marín Arrese 2011: 213). Thus, the current speaker may be encoded as the explicit source of the evaluation or the implicit one, or the speaker’s role may be opaque which is the case with expressions evoking a virtual or generalized conceptualiser such as e.g. *it seems* or *that means* (Marín Arrese 2011: 213–214). Following these dimensions, the speaker’s responsibility for the communicated information may be personal, shared, or “potentially” shared. Varying degrees of speaker commitment (and responsibility) are illustrated by the following examples: *I saw*, *I think*, *I have to say* (explicit personal responsibility), *as you can see*, *we all know*, *we can say* (explicit shared responsibility), *may*, *perhaps*, *possibly* (implicit personal responsibility), and *it seems*, *that meant*, *it was noted* (implicit opaque/shared responsibility). Detachment or non-commitment can, in turn, take the form of explicit disclaimers like *I don’t know*⁵ or *I don’t remember*.

3. Legitimation in political discourse

The association of linguistic resources which speakers mobilise to justify their actions with the enactment of power relations is visible in political discourse, which is the locus of values and ideologies, and which abounds in subjective and intersubjective expressions whose choice depends on the speaker’s epistemological position and interpersonal style, his/her social role, as well as personal and political goals. As will be shown in the remainder of this paper, the classification of stance markers outlined in Section 4.2 can be fruitfully put to work to explain how politicians communicate their decisions and policies to the general public, and how they discursively construct the reasons for their actions – implying that they “know better” and “are morally right” – in the hope of being obeyed.

As indicated above, the linguistic choices that politicians make reveal their positions on and assessments of the propositions they communicate.

⁵ It should not be forgotten, however, that *I don’t know* does not necessarily mark the speaker’s lack of knowledge, but that it can signal different states of knowledge and convey various pragmatic meanings, e.g. avoiding assessment; prefacing disagreement; avoiding explicit disagreement; avoiding explicit commitment; minimising impolite beliefs and indicating uncertainty (Tsui 1991).

At the same time, by making judgments, they convey, explicitly or implicitly, their value systems and ideologies. Legitimation, inevitably bound up with ideology, can in turn be approached as a means of seeking legitimacy and authorisation, with a view to demarcating legitimate actions from non-legitimate ones. While social theory stresses the fact that any system's legitimacy depends on acquiring and preserving support from the general public which must perceive the system as deserving voluntary compliance (Weber 1968: 953), linguistically-oriented accounts of legitimation focus on the discursive means used to affect people's perceptions of the system (see, e.g. Chilton 2004; van Leeuwen 2007; Reyes 2011; Meadows et al. 2022). In Chilton's (2004: 46) approach, for instance, legitimation refers specifically to how policy makers provide guarantees for the truth of what they say and how they imbue their utterances with evidence, authority and truth. It is also linked to boasting about one's performance and positive self-representation, and the speaker's attempts at establishing the right to be obeyed, i.e. legitimacy. Most crucially, as noted by Chilton (2004: 46), "[r]easons for being obeyed have to be communicated linguistically, whether by overt statement or by implication".

A useful distinction introduced by Chilton (2004: 117) is that into epistemic and deontic legitimation. Epistemic legitimation has to do with the speaker's claim to have better knowledge and recognition of the 'real' facts; to be more 'rational' and more 'objective', more advanced in his/her mode of thought than his/her rivals, whereas in the case of deontic legitimation, the speaker claims, explicitly or implicitly, to be not only 'right' in a cognitive sense, but 'right' in a moral sense (Chilton 2004: 111, 117). Added to this, in Chilton's view, may be what he refers to as "emotive coercion", i.e. a rhetorical mechanism which forces emotional responses (118). In this case, speaking publicly, political figures ground their positions in moral feelings and intuitions, and stimulate emotions like e.g. fear, anger, loyalty or a sense of security (117).

Political press conferences, "a distinctly formalised frontstage activity"⁶ (Ekström, Eriksson 2018: 345) taking place "on the political institution's initiative to announce policies, decisions, but also for handling challenging events" (Ekström, Eriksson 2018: 342), are a prime example of a discourse type associated with ideological positioning, evaluation and subjectivity.

⁶ In agreement with Goffman's (1959) theatrical metaphor, social life is a performance which may take place in three locations: "front stage", "back stage" and "off stage". Seen from this perspective, frontstage behaviour, intended for public viewing, reflects social norms and expectations, and can be purposeful and routinised. The setting of frontstage activities determines not only the participants' linguistic behaviour, but also their style, dress and use of material objects.

As an institutionalised form of public political communication – a discourse space for “doing” legitimisation – they are characterised by certain norms and rules, including the rules of talk and action: who says what, where, when and why, and by ritualisation (Bhatia 2006: 176). They typically consist of a pre-planned speech delivered by one or more politicians and a question-and-answer session in which journalists ask questions (Ekström, Eriksson 2018: 342). Thus, they subsume two distinct forms of discourse: rehearsed monologues (individual statements) and a more spontaneous interaction (questions and answers) akin to everyday conversation (Bhatia 2006: 179). In what follows, the pre-planned portions of several national-level press conferences will be analysed to demonstrate how politicians in two different socio-political settings make use of an array of stance resources to publicly legitimise their actions in times of a global health crisis.

4. Analysis

4.1. Background for the study and data

The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it a host of new medical, social and political realities and, concurrently, new types of interactions and social behaviours, as well as novel practices in news reporting. Regular press briefings on COVID-related issues such as the number of infections and deaths, the speed and scale of vaccine delivery, or the introduction and subsequent lifting of social restrictions, became a regular feature of news programmes in many countries. Our study examines four such events: two press conferences organised by the New Zealand government and two briefings delivered by Polish officials. As is relevant for the purpose of the current analysis, the conferences took place in February and March 2022 – i.e. during the Omicron wave which saw less severe infections and a smaller number of COVID-related deaths – becoming a forum for announcing new governmental policies and decisions regarding the lifting of restrictions (see Table 1).

Table 1. Dataset used for the study

Country	New Zealand		Poland	
Date	14 February 2022	21 March 2022	9 February 2022	23 February 2022
Speaker(s)	Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern	Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern	Health Minister Adam Niedzielski	Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki Health Minister Adam Niedzielski
Actions	NZ moves to Phase 3 of the Omicron response: – self-testing encouraged; – reduction of isolation and quarantine period.	NZ moves to the Orange traffic light: – lifting of most restrictions; – no capacity limits; – mask mandates remain in force.	Lifting of selected restrictions: – reduction of isolation and quarantine period; – no contact quarantine.	Lifting of most restrictions: – no capacity limits; – mask mandates in health centres remain in force.
Word count	1,332	3,243	1,568	1,449

Equally relevant is the broader context in which to situate the conferences, and which motivated the selection of material for the analysis (Table 2). The speakers can be seen not only as representatives of various linguistic backgrounds (New Zealand English and Polish), but also as proponents of, respectively, a proactive, coherent and well-defined pandemic policy implemented by the NZ government (known as the traffic lights or the COVID-19 Protection Framework) and a less transparent and poorly communicated response produced by the Polish government. As we argue below, the difference between the two policies and the degrees of commitment projected by the respective speakers found reflection in their discursive behaviour and, in particular, their choice of stance-taking resources. Thus, the data enabled us, on the one hand, to contrast more effective public communication strategies with less effective ones, and, on the other, to identify a correlation between the extent of the speaker's involvement and the type of linguistic marking indexical of varying degrees of agency and responsibility.

Table 2. COVID-19 response in New Zealand and Poland

	New Zealand⁷	Poland⁸
COVID-19 measures	vaccinations (vaccine mandates: health and disability, education, fire and emergency, police, defence force sector workers); mask mandates (health sector, education, public transport, public venues); social distancing; capacity limits for public gatherings; remote learning; remote working; travel restrictions.	vaccinations (vaccine mandates: health sector workers); mask mandates (health sector, public transport, public venues); social distancing; capacity limits for public gatherings; remote learning; remote working; no travel restrictions.
Population	5 m	38 m
Vaccinated population (two doses)	95%	50%
COVID-related deaths	1,954	116,510

It is also important to note that the analysis covers only these portions of the conferences which were monologic, pertained to the lifting of restrictions or related measures, and which were produced by the NZ Prime Minister, Polish Prime Minister or the Polish Health Minister (in total: 4,575 words in the NZ dataset and 3,017 words in the Polish dataset). Other portions which were unrelated to the restrictions or the pandemic, e.g. statements addressing economic issues or the war in Ukraine, as well as the follow-up Q&A sessions including responses of the co-present government officials, were excluded from the study.

4.2. Research focus and method

As already indicated, the goal of the research was twofold: 1) to identify legitimising strategies used to justify the lifting of COVID restrictions and related measures in the subgenre of political press conference; and

⁷ Data as at 23 July 2022, sources: <https://www.gov.pl/web/szczepimysie/raport-szczepien-przeciwko-covid-19>; <https://www.gov.pl/web/koronawirus/wykaz-zarazen-koronawirusem-sars-cov-2>.

⁸ Data as at 23 July 2022, source: <https://covid19.govt.nz/news-and-data/covid-19-data-and-statistics>.

2) to establish how agency and responsibility were discursively constructed in two divergent socio-political settings by speakers of two different languages (New Zealand English and Polish). To this end, we relied on the macro-categories of stance proposed in Marín Arrese (2011), i.e. those linked to effective stance and those indexing epistemic stance, applying them to both the NZ and the Polish data (for a full list of categories, see Tables 3 and 4).⁹

Table 3. Effective stance markers (adapted from Marín Arrese 2011)

Effective stance (EF)	English	Polish
Deonticity Deontic modals, modals of possibility and necessity, and adverbs, predicative adjectives and nominals [DEO]	<i>must, should, can, could, cannot, have to, need to, it is impossible to, it allows us to</i>	<i>powinny dotyczyć</i> ‘should entail’, <i>mogę</i> ‘I can’, <i>będziemy mogli podejmować</i> ‘we will be able to take’
Assessments Personal and impersonal predicates expressing desirability, requirement or normativity [ASSE]	<i>that requires, it is essential to, it is right to, it is time to</i>	<i>spodziewamy się</i> ‘we expect’, <i>wymaga</i> ‘it requires’
Attitudinals Modals of volition and personal predicates expressing inclination, intention or commitment [ATT]	<i>I will/won’t, I would not, I want, I am determined to</i>	<i>mam nadzieję</i> ‘I hope’, <i>będziemy chcieli</i> ‘we will want’
Directives Personal predicates of communication used with a directive illocutionary force; imperatives and hortatives [DIR]	<i>get tested, we are urging, let us recall</i>	<i>pozostańmy solidarni</i> ‘let us remain in solidarity’, <i>proszę zwrócić uwagę</i> ‘please note’

⁹ Some of the category descriptions used in the current study differ from those found in Marín Arrese (2011). When referring to experiential, cognitive and communicative phenomena, we use the term “stance”, rather than “evidentiality”, since, in our view, the latter should be interpreted more narrowly.

Table 4. Epistemic stance markers (adapted from Marín Arrese 2011)

Epistemic stance (EP)	English	Polish
Epistemic modality Epistemic modals; adverbs, predicative adjectives and nominals [EPI]	<i>must, will, would, may, I am certain, perhaps, probably, undoubtedly</i>	<i>na pewno</i> ‘certainly’, <i>oczywiście</i> ‘of course’, <i>najbardziej prawdopodobny</i> ‘most probable’
Truth-factual validity Personal and impersonal predicates expressing factive or affective meanings; adverbs, predicative adjectives and nominals [TFV]	<i>I am confident that, the truth is, frankly, in fact</i>	<i>tak naprawdę</i> ‘in fact’, <i>faktycznie</i> ‘in fact’, <i>rzeczywiście</i> ‘indeed’
Experiential stance Personal predicates of perceptual or mental observation; adverbs, predicative adjectives and nominals [EXP]	<i>we have seen, it is evident, clearly, I have heard, it seems/appears</i>	<i>widać</i> ‘it can be seen’, <i>widzimy</i> ‘we can see’, <i>bardzo wyraźnie</i> ‘very clearly’
Cognitive stance Personal predicates of mental state; adverbs, predicative adjectives and nominals [COG]	<i>I think, we all know, we have learned, that means</i>	<i>wiem</i> ‘I know’, <i>co oznacza</i> ‘which means’, <i>jak Państwo wiecie</i> ‘as you know’
Communicative stance Personal predicates of communication and verbal interaction [COM]	<i>I say to you, I said, that implies, that tells us</i>	<i>chciałem powiedzieć</i> ‘I wanted to say’, <i>można powiedzieć</i> ‘one can say’, <i>podkreślamy</i> ‘we are stressing’

To provide a more fine-grained account of the speakers’ positioning and commitment to propositional material, we additionally considered the type of responsibility encoded by the markers, following the distinctions introduced in Marín Arrese (2011) and subsequently revised in Marín Arrese (2015, 2021). We thus considered the subjective/intersubjective distinction as well as the explicitness vs implicitness of the conceptualiser’s role in addition to the effective and epistemic macro-categories. This resulted in the adoption of the following types of markers: Subjective-Explicit (SE), Subjective-Implicit (SI), Intersubjective-Explicit (IE) and Intersubjective-Implicit (II) (Table 5).¹⁰

¹⁰ It should be further explained that our analysis draws primarily on Marín Arrese (2011) and that it does not include all the subcategories proposed in Marín Arrese (2015, 2021). We deem the classification adopted in the current study sufficient for our purposes.

Table 5. Categories of markers linked to the conceptualiser's salience

Marker category	English	Polish
Subjective-Explicit [SE] (personal responsibility)	<i>I think, I know, I hope</i>	<i>myślę</i> 'I think', <i>wiem</i> 'I know', <i>mam nadzieję</i> 'I hope'
Subjective-Implicit [SI] (personal responsibility)	<i>may, should, probably</i>	<i>może</i> 'may', <i>należy</i> 'should', <i>prawdopodobnie</i> 'probably'
Intersubjective-Explicit [IE] (shared responsibility)	<i>we know, as you see, let us see</i>	<i>widzimy</i> 'we can see', <i>jak widzicie</i> 'as you see', <i>wiedzą Państwo</i> 'as you know'
Intersubjective-Implicit [II] (shared/opaque responsibility)	<i>it seems, that means</i>	<i>wydaje się</i> 'it seems', <i>oznacza</i> 'that means'

These resources, as argued throughout this paper, may be perceived as serving the purpose of managing (the acceptance of) beliefs and knowledge in discourse (Marín Arrese 2015), that is legitimation. Our understanding of this notion concurs with that expounded in Chilton (cf. Section 3), whereby legitimation is predominantly a linguistic enterprise; that is, we acknowledge that whatever the speaker's stance, authority or ideology, it needs to be communicated with the use of words.¹¹ Like Habermas (1984), we also subscribe to the view that linguistic behaviour is a medium through which goal-oriented rationality of an intersubjective kind is realised, and through which speakers lay claims to truth and truthfulness. It is through the strategic use of language that political actors establish, as pointed out by Chilton (2004: 46), their right to be obeyed and, at the same time, present negatively and delegitimise "others".

Related to the above is (critical) genre theory (Swales 1990; Bhatia 2015) which also informs our study. From this perspective, press conferences are "a broad category of conventionalized communicative events covering many domains, such as sports, religion, business, law and medicine, among many others" (Bhatia 2006: 175). Political press conferences, with no definite boundaries, constitute a subgenre which combines features of political discourse and media discourse, and which serves to mediatise political actions (Bhatia 2006: 176). This is possible given that political press conferences are "held for the benefit of the general populace and members of the media who construe and attach motive to what political figures say, in part creating the reality we are familiar with" (Bhatia 2006: 176). Importantly, in this setting, the participants include not only the speakers and media representatives

¹¹ That is not to say that legitimation is achieved with the use of words alone. For instance, in their study into anti-immigration discourse, Hart and Winter (2022) demonstrate that prejudice and discriminatory actions can be legitimised with the use of gestures.

who are present at the scene, but also the general public being the ultimate beneficiary of the message.

With this in mind, we looked not only at individual stance markers associated with legitimisation and providing justificatory support for the claims being made, but also the most salient discursive strategies, unaccounted for by the macro-categories of stance, but clearly constructing agency. In doing so, we adopted Halliday's (1989: 101) perspective on grammar seen as "a means of representing patterns of experience", enabling humans to construct a subjective picture of reality that suits their interests and needs.

Following a manual analysis of the transcripts and a careful perusal of the videos, eight discursive strategies were detected:

1. Claiming agency by describing actions taken by the government;
2. Appeals to authority and evidence;
3. Invoking the spirit of community;
4. Personification of the virus/the pandemic;
5. Building contrasts;
6. Importance marking;
7. Boasting about success;
8. Stressing size and magnitude.

Both the markers and the strategies were first annotated independently by each of the authors and then compared and discussed. The final classification was reached upon the authors' mutual agreement.

4.3. Findings

The analysis has revealed the ways in which the NZ and Polish government officials relied on epistemic and effective stance resources to justify their assertions, as well as uncovered several discursive strategies which the speakers pursued to either foreground or background agency. In this section, we discuss the types of markers which were most common in the two datasets alongside the strategies which helped the speakers to legitimise the proposed measures. The strategies include: appeals to authority, invocation of the spirit of togetherness, personification of the virus/the pandemic, marking of contrast, importance, size and magnitude, as well as boasting about success.

When comparing both datasets in terms of subjectivity vs intersubjectivity, we noted that the division of labour between the two categories was very similar (Figures 1 and 2).¹² In the NZ data, SE and SI markers accounted for 39%, while IE and II markers represented 61%. In the PL data, in very much the same way, SE and SI markers represented 42%, and IE and II markers – 58%. More

¹² Coding: SE – Subjective-Explicit; SI – Subjective-Implicit; IE – Intersubjective-Explicit; II – Intersubjective-Implicit.

differences were however visible when the extent of explicitness vs implicitness was considered: in the NZ data, SE and IE markers accounted for 59%, whereas in the PL data the figure stood at 47%. This suggests that the NZ Prime Minister marked explicitness more frequently than did the Polish speakers.

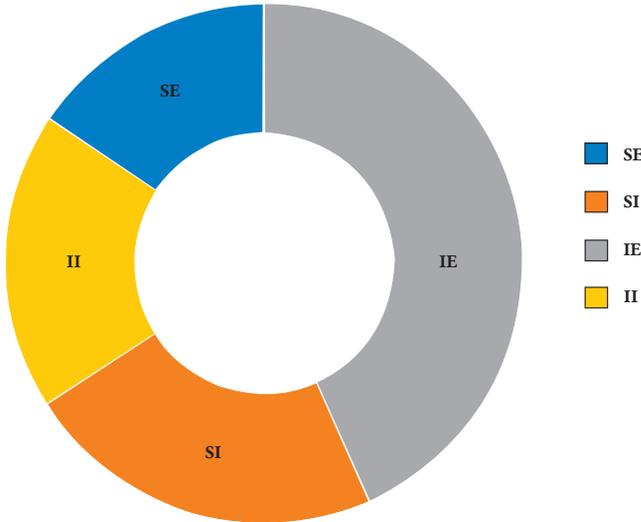


Figure 1. Subjective and intersubjective stance markers in the NZ data

Source: own work.

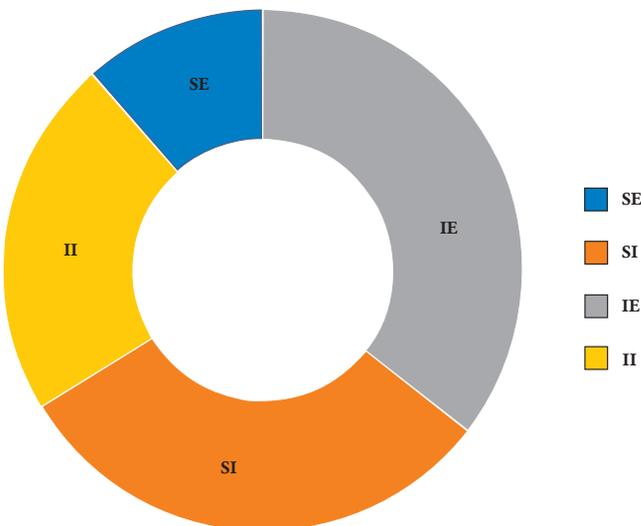


Figure 2. Subjective and intersubjective stance markers in the PL data

Source: own work.

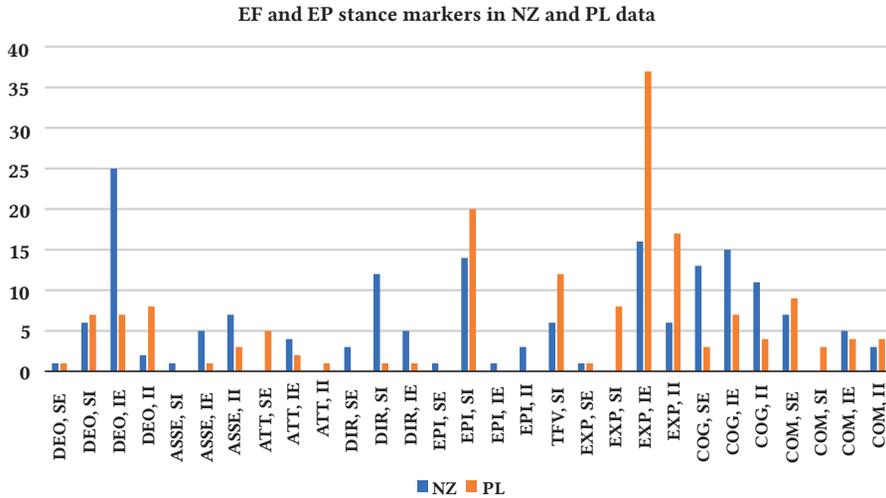


Figure 3. Effective (EF) and epistemic (EP) stance markers in the NZ and PL data

When comparing individual categories of markers, in the NZ data, we discovered a clear preference for IE markers of deonticity (e.g. *we can move; we need to*). In terms of frequency,¹³ these were followed by IE markers of experiential stance (e.g. *we've seen; and you can see*), IE markers of cognitive stance (e.g. *we suspect; we predict*), as well as SI markers of epistemic modality (e.g. *may seem; of course*), SE markers of cognitive stance (e.g. *I know; I imagine*) and SI directives (e.g. *get boosted; get tested*).¹⁴ In the Polish material, on the other hand, the most common were IE markers of experiential stance (e.g. *widzimy* 'we can see'; *patrzymy* 'we are looking'), SI markers of epistemic modality (e.g. *oczywiście* 'of course'; *na pewno* 'certainly'), II markers of experiential stance (e.g. *widać* 'one sees'; *wszystkie te informacje wskazują* 'all of the information shows') and SI markers of truth-factual validity (e.g. *tak naprawdę* 'as a matter of fact'; *faktycznie* 'in fact') (for individual frequencies, see Figure 3). These differences suggest that the NZ Prime Minister tended to signal shared responsibility and encouraged collective action, while the Polish speakers' discourse foregrounded external factors and was characterised by more distancing. In addition, as became clear,

¹³ The markers listed in this paragraph had at least 10 occurrences in the respective datasets.

¹⁴ It should be clarified that in the analysis imperatives are described as 'SI markers' (here the speaker is the implicit source of 'force'), whereas hortatives (in the case of which both the speaker and the addressee are 'targets' that are to carry out the proposed action) – as 'IE markers'.

the NZ material was neatly organised and exhibited features of pre-planned discourse. The Polish text, by contrast, was much more repetitive and resembled spontaneous production, rather than a pre-scripted monologue (its structure was looser and it contained redundancies).

Several contexts of use of some of the most common stance markers are illustrated below.

To begin with, let us consider (1a) and (1b) from the NZ corpus. In these instances, we see shared (i.e. intersubjective) markers of possibility (*we're able to welcome back; we can set out; tools that can keep... safe*) and necessity (*we need to continue*) – or “potentiality”, to use Marín Arrese's (2021) wording – which are used to instil positivity, to encourage collective action, and to unite New Zealanders on their “journey of reopening and recovery”.

(1)

- a) It's meant we're able to welcome back New Zealanders, family, friends, and tourists, and take the next steps on our journey of reopening and recovery, and today it means we can set out those next steps.
- b) So that tells us two things. First: with the ongoing presence of COVID in our community, we need to continue to use tools that can keep our vulnerable communities safe, such as those who are immunocompromised, and those with disabilities.

In (2), similarly, the Prime Minister appeals to the addressees, urging them by means of utterances with a directive illocutionary force (*we do have an ask for everyone; please stand ready; don't remove the app; please get vaccinated; please get boosted*) to “play their part” and to continue the successful response. Here, too, the speaker creates a sense of togetherness and solidarity as well as a sense of importance and urgency (*critical role; really important*).

(2)

We do have an ask for everyone, though: if a variant arises in the world that evades vaccines or is more deadly, contact tracing will, once again, provide a critical role. Please stand ready, as business, to stand up QR codes again, or, as a citizen, to pull out your tracer app at a moment's notice. Don't remove the app from your phone just yet. Scanning has been a really important part of what we've achieved, so thank you for everyone for playing your part.

The excerpts shown in (3a) and (3b) illustrate the use of mental verbs, that is markers of cognitive stance, by way of which the speaker refers to her own knowledge (*I know..., but I also know*) as well as conveys shared responsibility for the message (*we suspect; we currently predict*). Other stance-taking devices to be noted in (3b) include IE markers of experiential stance (*what you can also see*) – which were also frequent in the NZ material – and IE markers of communicative stance (*as we've discussed many times*). It is thanks to the co-occurrence of various signals indicating shared responsibility

(intersubjectivity) that the audience could obtain a sense of inclusion, and of pursuing common goals.

(3)

- a) I know there is COVID fatigue, but I also know that no one wants to let go of the freedoms we've gained from uniting and protecting one another.
- b) What you can also see is a relatively steady state, rather than a hard decline – as in, the fact that we suspect we will continue to maintain a certain level of cases. Based on the experience of the likes of Australia, we currently predict that we'll have a continuous rolling baseline of potentially several thousand cases a day. We also predict that we will have future spikes, with that being especially likely over the winter season, as we've discussed many times.

In the Polish dataset, on the other hand, the relation with the audience was constructed differently. Although shared responsibility was also marked, this referred chiefly to experiential stance indexing perceptual observation or external evidence accessible to everyone. This is clear in (4), where the Polish Prime Minister justifies the lifting of restrictions by referring to what “we can see today” (*dzisiaj widzimy*) “following [our] observations of what is happening around us in other countries, also in EU member states” (*po obserwacji tego, co dzieje się wokół nas w innych krajach, także w krajach Unii Europejskiej*). Similar uses of perception verbs, including IE markers (e.g. *obserwowaliśmy* ‘we were witnessing’; *których słuchaliśmy* ‘which we heard’) and II markers (e.g. *badanie pokazywało* ‘the study showed’; *tym bardziej widać* ‘it is all the more visible’), were not uncommon, just as other references to external circumstances (rather than the speaker’s inner states signalling personal responsibility) which were used to validate the government’s actions.

(4)

Dzisiaj widzimy po wielu konsultacjach medycznych po obserwacji tego, co dzieje się wokół nas w innych krajach, także w krajach Unii Europejskiej, których, w których przebieg tego wariantu wirusa, czyli o nazwie omikron, jest również podobny do przebiegu u nas. Widzimy, że można zalecić daleko idące zmiany, można znieść znaczącą część wszystkich ograniczeń, które były do tej pory obowiązujące, znieść te restrykcje, które towarzyszyły nam, no można powiedzieć, właściwie przez wiele, wiele miesięcy i kwartałów.

‘Today we see, following many medical consultations, following [our] observations of what is happening around us in other countries, also in the EU member states which, in which the situation with this variant, that is omicron, is similar to ours. We see that one can recommend far-reaching changes, one can lift many of the restrictions which were in force, do away with the restrictions which accompanied us, well, one may say, actually, for many, many months and quarters of the year’.

Another visible feature in the Polish corpus was the presence of SI markers of possibility and necessity, in constructions like the ones illustrated in

(4): e.g. *można zalecić* ('one can recommend'), *można znieść* ('one can lift') and (5): *która pozwoli nam* ('which will allow us'). Together with markers of communicative stance (e.g. *można powiedzieć* 'one can say'; *to trzeba podkreślić* 'one needs to stress'), epistemic modality (e.g. *na pewno* 'certainly'; *wydaje się najbardziej prawdopodobnym* 'seems to be most probable'), truth-factual validity (e.g. *tak naprawdę* 'as a matter of fact'; *rzeczywiście* 'indeed') and experiential stance (e.g. *tym bardziej widać* 'it is all the more visible'), they contributed to the impersonality of the Polish discourse, both that produced by the Health Minister (as in (5)) and that of the Prime Minister (as in (4)).

(5)

Jednak pandemia też pokazała, czym są szczepienia, jak bardzo mocno chronią szczepienia przede wszystkim przed zgonem. To też trzeba podkreślić, że dużo lepiej chronią przed zgonem niż przed samym zakażeniem, bo wiem, że taka dyskusja również się toczy w Internecie, w mediach i wśród specjalistów, ale przecież zgon jest tą największą tragedią, w związku z tym podkreślamy cały czas, żeby się zaszczepić, żeby szczepienie było tą tarczą, która pozwoli nam do końca zwalczyć epidemię.

'However, the pandemic has also shown to us what vaccines mean and how well they protect [us], mostly against death. It needs to be stressed that they are much more effective as regards protection against death than protection against infection, because I know that this kind of discussion is also going on online, in the media, amongst specialists, but death is the greatest tragedy of all; therefore, we stress it all the time that one should get vaccinated, that getting vaccinated should be a shield which will allow us to fight off the epidemic'.

It is also noteworthy that the markers were not used in isolation, but that they tended to co-occur. This was evident in particular in the case of the Polish material which did not resemble pre-scripted statements, but rather spontaneous discourse: structurally much looser than the NZ texts and, therefore, much more repetitive and characterised by an accumulation of multiple stance markers of various kinds.

Turning now to the discursive strategies, the press conferences appeared to be dominated by references to the government's actions. Other strategies, already listed in Section 4.2 above, included appeals to authority, invocation of the spirit of togetherness, personification of the virus/the pandemic, marking of contrast, importance, size and magnitude, as well as boasting about success. In what follows, we will take them up one by one, comparing the NZ and the Polish examples and explaining their role in the (de)construction of agency.

Claiming agency by describing actions taken by the government

As it turned out, explicit references to the government's present and past actions were common in both datasets. Most of them took the form of active clauses like *we've secured rapid antigen tests* in (6) and *przywracamy*

również normalną pracę w urzędach ('we're restoring normal office work') in (7a); however, occasionally, changes were communicated in the passive voice, with the focus being put on the measures themselves, and not on the doers, as in e.g. *było dokonywanych bardzo dużo modyfikacji* ('a great many modifications were being made') in (7b)). In addition, in the NZ corpus, the perfective aspect was preferred, which foregrounded the accomplishment of the government's goals.

(6)

We've secured enough rapid antigen tests to deal with a widespread Omicron outbreak, with 7.2 million currently in the country and more arriving over the next week. While cases will still be diagnosed by the more familiar PCR tests, in the spirit of speeding up our work to rule out the virus, RATs will start to be used more widely, including in the close contact exemption scheme and throughout high-risk settings, like for visitors to aged-care facilities as dr Verrall set out earlier today.

(7)

a) ale przywracamy również normalną pracę w urzędach. W urzędach obowiązywała praca zdalna, w firmach, przedsiębiorstwach zalecana była praca zdalna. Dzisiaj znosimy to zalecenie, dzisiaj urzędy wracają do normalnego funkcjonowania.

'but we are also restoring normal office work. Office clerks worked remotely, in business, enterprises, remote work was recommended. Today we are lifting this recommendation, today offices are going back to normal work'.

b) Druga decyzja, którą chciałem zakomunikować, dotyczy zasad związanych z izolacją i kwarantanną. Tutaj przez cały czas trwania pandemii było dokonywanych bardzo dużo modyfikacji, bardzo dużo zmian i ten system niestety stał się nieco mniej, nieco mało przejrzysty i wymaga takiej rewizji, jeśli można powiedzieć, na nowo zdefiniowania różnych zasad.

'The second decision which I wanted to communicate [to you] is related to the rules of isolation and quarantine. Here, throughout the whole pandemic a great many modifications were being made, a great many changes, and this system has unfortunately become a bit less transparent, a bit untransparent, and it requires some revision, if one can put it that way, various rules need to be redefined'.

Appeals to authority and evidence

Justification for the government's actions took the form of references to expert voices (cf. Reyes 2011), be it those of medical specialists, modellers, advisors, or public health officials, as in (8) and (9). In addition, the speakers presented visuals showing results of surveys and studies with a view to providing additional support for the decisions taken by the government.¹⁵ This strategy was identified in both datasets. What was found only in the Polish

¹⁵ For reasons of space, we do not discuss visuals in our analysis.

corpus, however, was legitimisation based on references to other European states' COVID measures (as in (9b)), which could be likened to what van Leeuwen (2007) calls "role model authority". No specific references to other countries' COVID policies were found in the NZ corpus, which may be interpreted as the NZ government's greater confidence in the validity of its own policies.¹⁶

(8)

a) And that's why, on the advice of our public health team, we are removing all outdoor gathering limits: sports, concerts, gatherings outside without limit will resume.

b) In fact, modellers say that total infections now could be as high as 1.7 million.

(9)

a) są przekonsultowane z Radą do spraw COVID-19, w której znajduje się wielu bardzo wybitnych specjalistów od spraw epidemii
'have been consulted with the COVID-19 Council composed of many renowned specialists in epidemiology'

b) kolejne kraje europejskie dzisiaj znoszą restrykcje, znoszą obostrzenia i wracają do normalności
'more European countries are lifting restrictions today and are returning to normalcy'

Invoking the spirit of community

Another important source of legitimisation was linked to the invocation of the spirit of community, or a sense of solidarity and togetherness. Forming a discourse of values and moral justification (cf. moral evaluation (van Leeuwen 2007) and altruism (Reyes 2011) as sources of authority), the NZ Prime Minister appealed to her citizens' conscience and encouraged New Zealanders to stand united, care for the well-being of the vulnerable, and to protect their local communities (see e.g. (10)). Such uses were however not attested by the Polish data, in which references to the Polish nation as a united whole were found only in contexts in which the Health Minister was talking about donating surplus vaccines to other countries. The Polish words denoting "community", i.e. *wspólnota* and *społeczność*, were used neither by the Health Minister nor the Prime Minister.

(10)

First: with the ongoing presence of COVID in our community, we need to continue to use tools that can keep our vulnerable communities safe, such as those who are immunocompromised, and those with disabilities.

¹⁶ It may also be the case, as noted by one of the reviewers, that other factors were at play, given that Poland shares a landmass with other European countries, whereas New Zealand is an island.

(11)

Dlatego też jako Polska bardzo aktywnie włączamy się w programy czy projekty, które mówią o tym, że pomagamy innym krajom, które nie miały zapewnionego takiego dostępu do szczepień jak obywatele polscy. Przekazujemy odpłatnie, czasami również w formie darowizny.

‘That is why as Poland we actively participate in programmes or projects which say that we are helping other countries which did not have access to vaccinations like Polish citizens did. We sell, sometimes also give away in the form of donations’.

Personification of the virus/the pandemic

Not without significance to the construction of agency was the personification of the virus, or more broadly, the pandemic. And even though such examples were not too frequent, they did evidence the construction of COVID and its various guises as a threatening agent able to act on its own and affect humans. This is illustrated in (12a) and (12b) – *COVID finds the unvaccinated; Omicron is ... entering our homes* and (13) – *może dojść do takiej mutacji, która wymknie się ochronie immunologicznej* (‘a mutation which evades immunity may appear’); *pandemia nas wszystkich nauczyła pokory* (‘the pandemic has taught us all humility’).

(12)

- a) The reality, too, is that COVID finds the unvaccinated and, for them, the illness can be severe.
- b) While 1.9 million New Zealanders have had their booster, 1.2 million who are due have not. It’s very clear that the job is not done. Omicron is here and, increasingly, entering our homes.

(13)

- a) gdzieś na świecie może dojść do takiej mutacji, która wymknie się ochronie immunologicznej
‘somewhere in the world a mutation which evades immunity may appear’
- b) Szanowni Państwo, rozdział pandemii niestety nie jest jeszcze zamknięty. To też trzeba powiedzieć jednoznacznie, pandemia nas wszystkich nauczyła pokory, nauczyła spokojnego podejmowania decyzji.
‘Ladies and gentlemen, the pandemic is not over yet. This needs to be said clearly. The pandemic has taught us all humility, has taught us how to calmly take decisions’.

Building contrasts

Setting up contrasts was another means of building authority and foregrounding improvements. Interestingly, even though similar THEN vs NOW argumentative schemata were found in the NZ and the Polish data, some

differences in their realisations were noted. For instance, in (14), The NZ Prime Minister contrasted the absence of effective tools during the initial stage of the pandemic (*there was no vaccine, there were no antiviral medicines...; so we built our own defences... But those defences were blunt.*) with the presence of efficient measures during its later stages (*with time came other tools to help us look after one another*). In example (15), on the other hand, the Polish Prime Minister juxtaposed the negative effect of external circumstances at the beginning of the pandemic (repeating *musieliśmy* ('we had to') three times) with the positive effect of external factors making the lifting of restrictions possible during the Omicron wave (*po obserwacji tego, co dzieje się wokół nas* ('following [our] observations of what is happening around us'); *widzimy, że można zalecić* ('we see that one can recommend'); *można znieść* ('one can lift')). Thus, again, the NZ Prime Minister stressed her government's agency and effective implementation of "tools", whereas the Polish Prime Minister foregrounded the impact of external circumstances, rather than the government's actions.

(14)

Days prior, we [...] There was no vaccine, there were no antiviral medicines, there was very little data to tell us which public health restrictions worked and which did not; so we built our own defences, and we hunkered down. But those defences were blunt. They were hard, and they were always intended to be temporary, not because we would get tired and want to move on but because with time came other tools to help us look after one another; tools that weren't as blunt and weren't as hard to live with.

(15)

[...] od ponad dwóch lat. Musieliśmy się w tym czasie zmierzyć z wyzwaniem [...] musieliśmy wdrażać bardzo wiele różnych ograniczeń i nowych zasad [...], musieliśmy także wprowadzić zasady, które wiązały się z bardzo wieloma zmianami w życiu [...]. Dzisiaj widzimy po wielu konsultacjach medycznych, po obserwacji tego, co dzieje się wokół nas w innych krajach, także w krajach Unii Europejskiej, których, w których przebieg tego wariantu wirusa, czyli o nazwie omikron, jest również podobny do przebiegu u nas, widzimy, że można zalecić daleko idące zmiany, można znieść znaczącą część wszystkich ograniczeń, które były do tej pory obowiązujące, znieść te restrykcje, które towarzyszyły nam [...] '[...] for more than two years. During that time we had to face challenges [...], we had to implement very many limitations and new rules [...], we also had to introduce measures which entailed many changes in [our] lives [...]. Today we see, following many medical consultations, following [our] observations of what is happening around us in other countries, also in EU member states, which, in which the situation with this variant, that is omicron, is similar to ours. We see that one can recommend far-reaching changes, one can lift many of the restrictions which were in force, do away with the restrictions which accompanied us [...]'

Importance marking

Both datasets were also replete with various markers stressing high importance (see e.g. (2a) and (16)). Apart from such common adjectives as e.g. *critical* and *important*, as shown in (17), in the NZ data we detected numerous examples of the emphatic “do”, as in e.g. (2b) and (16). Significance was likewise emphasised by means of verbal references to figures and statistics (not shown here). In this case, the patterns were strikingly similar in both datasets.

(16)

While that’s not something we get to decide anymore, we do have a choice in how we manage it.

(17)

ale tu jest bardzo ważna informacja, że w przypadku likwidacji tej kwarantanny dotyczy to też tych osób, które w tej chwili przebywają na kwarantannie właśnie wynikającej z rozpoznania kontaktu w wyniku wywiadu epidemicznego.
‘but here is this very important piece of information that in the case of this quarantine which is being lifted, this applies also to people who are currently under quarantine, who are quarantining because their contact [with an infected person] has been traced’.

Boasting about success

Another important means of legitimisation in the NZ data was that of presenting the government’s actions as noteworthy achievements and depicting success as the result of a clear COVID policy (see (18)). When talking about improvements, the Polish Health Minister, on the other hand, tended to focus on external factors, rather than his own actions, thus contributing to the portrayal of the government as a rather passive body. An example of this can be seen in (19), where the Minister talks about *what we have witnessed* and the number of infections being reduced (in the original utterance the reflexive form of the verb *reduce* is used: *redukuje się* [lit. ‘is reducing itself’]).

(18)

New Zealand successfully eliminated the first wave and recorded the lowest number of deaths of any country in the OECD for two years in a row. Our actions saved thousands of lives and, without ever setting out to, New Zealand is now known for our successful COVID response. Putting people’s health first was also the strongest economic response. There’s no doubt that we are now feeling the full brunt of global headwinds, but our comparatively low debt, record low unemployment, and record investments in infrastructure and skills development will all help support our recovery.

(19)

W ostatnich tygodniach tak naprawdę mieliśmy do czynienia ze spadkami nawet powyżej 30% z tygodnia na tydzień i to spowodowało, że tak jak szybko osiągnęliśmy apogeum piątej fali, tak też bardzo szybko redukuje się ta liczba zakażeń. 'In recent weeks, we have in fact witnessed decreases, even higher than 30% week on week, and this caused us to reach the peak of the fifth wave so quickly, so this is also the reason why the number of infections is decreasing so quickly'.

Stressing size and magnitude

Last but not least in our inventory of discursive strategies were references to the enormous scale of the pandemic as a whole (as in (20a)), on the one hand, and descriptions of the clearly decreasing number of deaths and infections during the Omicron wave, on the other, as illustrated in (20b), (21a) and (21b). This strategy was present in both the NZ and the Polish corpus.

(20)

- a) the world had seen 1.5 million deaths, increasing to over 5 million by the end of the second year
- b) We currently have nearly 5,000 active COVID cases, and 39 of those are in hospital, none in ICU.

(21)

- a) Szanowni Państwo, dzisiaj wraz z malejącym natężeniem epidemii z nadzieją możemy patrzeć w przyszłość.
'Ladies and gentlemen, today, with the decreasing intensity of the epidemic, we may look into the future with hope'.
- b) około 350 dziennie hospitalizacji mniej, co powoduje, że jest to blisko 2 500 hospitalizacji mniej
'about 350 daily hospitalisations less than before, which means there are nearly 2,500 hospitalisations less than before'

Overall, the data indicate that the repertoire of stance devices used for speaker positioning and the choice of the dominant discursive strategies foregrounded with the aim of justifying the government's actions were indeed quite diverse.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study has examined the ways in which New Zealand and Polish government officials legitimised the lifting of COVID restrictions and constructed agency in national-level press conferences. It was found that the degree of commitment of respective speakers was reflected in their choice of effective and epistemic stance markers, and the inclusion of certain discursive

strategies. The model of stance proposed in Marín Arrese (2011, 2015, 2021) enabled us to make cross-linguistic comparisons and to identify differences in the respective speakers' visibility in the NZ and the Polish data, reflected in the choice of subjective or intersubjective markers and the conceptualiser's salience. We have also shown that the selection of discursive strategies is tightly linked to the agency and responsibility projected by the speakers, who, by introducing certain discourse themes and arguments, lay claim to truth and authority, and position their actions as legitimate in a bid to establish their right to be obeyed.

In pursuing our analysis, we detected several differences between the two datasets. The NZ Prime Minister appeared more involved, selecting personal, rather than impersonal structures, and relied chiefly on cognitive and deontic stance markers (39 and 34 instances, respectively). She specifically used IE markers of deonticity (e.g. *we can move to; we need to*), opted for SE and IE cognitive stance (e.g. *I imagine; we suspect*) as well as IE experiential stance (e.g. *we are now seeing; and you can see*), and produced utterances with a directive illocutionary force (e.g. *get boosted; let's start with*). The Polish speakers, in turn, projected less involvement and tended to convey experiential stance (63 instances). This included IE evidentials (e.g. *widzimy* 'we can see') and II evidentials (*widac* 'one sees'), by means of which the speakers supported their claims with external evidence and invited the audience "to see for themselves". Noteworthy was the low frequency of directives in the Polish data, which, again, suggests less direct communication in a context where a higher degree of persuasiveness is to be expected.

When identifying the discursive strategies, we also obtained a sense of how the speakers (de)constructed their agency and how they assumed responsibility. In the NZ dataset, the government's role was highly visible. The Prime Minister presented a coherent account of the government's strategy, and of the actions taken (referring to the traffic lights system, subsequent phases of the plan and the implemented tools), appealed to authority and evidence (e.g. *on the advice of our public health team*), invoked the spirit of community and the common good (making frequent references to *our community* and those who need protection, i.e. *the vulnerable*), set up contrasts between the initial stage of the pandemic and the Omicron wave, stressed size and magnitude, relied on intensifiers (among which the emphatic 'do' clearly stood out) and, finally, foregrounded the positive outcomes of the government's actions (e.g. *NZ has successfully eliminated*). Taken together, these strategies built a coherent picture of a successful response to a public health crisis, even though the dangers posed by the pandemic were still acknowledged (the agency of the virus was shown e.g. through personification).

In the Polish data, on the other hand, much less agency was palpable. While the speakers, admittedly, referred to their actions (e.g. *dzisiaj znosimy* ‘today we are lifting’), they failed to communicate a coherent plan and its methodical implementation. As justification for the government’s policy, the Polish Prime Minister provided examples of other countries and their actions (e.g. *kolejne kraje europejskie dzisiaj znoszą* ‘more European countries are lifting restrictions today’), situating the Polish response to the Omicron wave as that following trends observed elsewhere in Europe. Like the NZ Prime Minister, he also appealed to authority and evidence (medical council, clinicians, charts), stressed size and magnitude, and used intensifiers. However, unlike Jacinda Ardern’s discourse, his communication was much less organised, its structure was looser, and it was interspersed with mitigators attenuating the force of the assertions (e.g. *mają taki charakter czysto epidemiczny* ‘are of such a purely epidemic kind’). It was not imbued with the spirit of togetherness, either. The few references to the Polish nation as a united whole appeared in contexts related to the assistance provided to other nations (i.e. sharing surplus vaccines with them). Finally, when talking about improvements, the Polish Health Minister drew attention to external factors, rather than the government’s plans and actions (e.g. *mamy do czynienia* ‘we are dealing with’), and personified the virus. This, too, shows that instead of foregrounding the government’s ability to act, he in fact deconstructed its agency and de-emphasized responsibility.

In light of the above, it may be argued that for governmental policies to be successful, they, in the first place, have to be communicated effectively. As our data suggest, the NZ government, which took pride in its successful management of the pandemic, pursued effective communication strategies. The Polish government, whose response to the crisis was much less impressive and which did not seem to fully identify with the pandemic policy it announced, failed to convey its intentions clearly and cogently, or to unite Poles as a nation. In this context, one may ask about the effect that the use of specific communication practices and legitimising strategies has on the population’s response to governmental policies. This, however, lies outside the scope of the current study and should be considered by sociologists, political scientists and PR specialists who may benefit from findings of discourse-analytic studies pointing to the role that stance-taking resources play in effective discursive legitimisation.

Primary sources

- Press conference held by Jacinda Ardern and Ashley Bloomfield, 14 February 2022. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZKQOGy0CIg> (date of access: 20 March 2022).
- Press conference held by Jacinda Ardern and Ayesha Verrall, 23 March 2022. Online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_hp6vhcPhY&t=174s (date of access: 20 March 2022).
- Press conference held by Adam Niedzielski and Przemysław Czarnek, 9 February 2022. Online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgQDmLo_K6E (date of access: 20 March 2022).
- Press conference held by Mateusz Morawiecki and Adam Niedzielski, 23 February 2022. Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZXUSei-u0I> (date of access: 20 March 2022).

References

- BENVENISTE Émile (1971). Subjectivity in language. In *Problems in General Linguistics*, Émile BENVENISTE (ed.). Trans. by Mary Elizabeth MEEK, 223-230. University of Miami Press: Coral Gables (FL).
- BHATIA Aditi (2006). Critical discourse analysis of political press conferences. *Discourse & Society* 17(2), 173-203. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506058057>.
- BHATIA Vijay K. (2015). Critical Genre Analysis: Theoretical preliminaries. *Hermes. Journal of Language and Communication in Business* 54, 9-20. <https://doi.org/10.7146/hjlc.v27i54.22944>.
- BIBER Douglas, JOHANSSON Stig, LEECH Geoffrey, CONRAD Susan, FINEGAN Edward (1999). *The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. London: Longman.
- BOYE Kasper (2012). *Epistemic Meaning: A Cross-linguistic and Functional-cognitive Study*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- BRANDT Per (2004). Evidentiality and enunciation. A cognitive and semiotic approach. In *Perspectives on Evidentiality and Modality*, Juana Isabel MARÍN ARRESE (ed.), 3-10. Madrid: Editorial Complutense.
- BRZEŹNIAK Filip (2020). Epidemia strachu i wojenna mobilizacja. Pierwsze miesiące pandemicznego dyskursu publicznego w Polsce. *Dyskurs & Dialog* 4, 79-97. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4337360>.
- CHILTON Paul (2004). *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- DENDALE Patrick, TASMOWSKI Liliane (2001). Introduction: Evidentiality and related notions. *Journal of Pragmatics* 33(3), 339-348. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(00\)00005-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(00)00005-9).
- EKSTRÖM Mats, ERIKSSON Göran (2018). Press conferences. In *Routledge Handbook of Language and Politics*, Ruth WODAK, Bernhard FORCHTNER (eds.), 342-355. London: Routledge.
- ENGBRETTSON Robert (ed.). (2007). *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

- GILRAY Claire (2021). Performative control and rhetoric in Aotearoa New Zealand's Response to COVID-19. *Frontiers in Political Science* 3, 662245. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.662245>.
- GOFFMAN Erving (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- HABERMAS Jürgen (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. I: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Trans. by Thomas MCCARTHY. Boston: Beacon. [German, 1981, vol. 1].
- HAFNER Christoph, SUN Tongle (2021). The 'team of 5 million': The joint construction of leadership discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic in New Zealand. *Discourse, Context & Media* 43, 100523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2021.100523>.
- HALLIDAY Michael Alexander Kirkwood (1989). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Arnold.
- HART Christopher, WINTER Bodo (2022). Gesture and legitimation in the anti-immigration discourse of Nigel Farage. *Discourse & Society* 33(1), 34-55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265211048560>.
- HOFFMANN Marta (2022). Polscy parlamentarzyści wobec pandemii COVID-19. Przykład scjentyfikacji debaty publicznej? *Politeja* 2(77), 253-272. <https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.19.2022.77.11>.
- JAWORSKA Sylvia (2021). Competence and collectivity: The discourse of Angela Merkel's media communications during the first wave of the pandemic. *Discourse, Context & Media* 42, 100506. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2021.100506>.
- KEARNS Robin (2021). Narrative and metaphors in New Zealand's efforts to eliminate COVID-19. *Geographical Research* 59(3), 324-330. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12492>.
- LANGACKER Ronald W. (2000). *Grammar and Conceptualization*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- LANGACKER Ronald W. (2009). *Investigations in Cognitive Grammar*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- ŁOTOCKI Łukasz, MIKIŃSKI Krzysztof (2022). Strefy konfliktu w polskim dyskursie politycznym wokół strategii walki z pandemią COVID-19. *Studia Politologiczne* 65, 212-243. <https://doi.org/10.33896/SPolit.2022.65.10>.
- MARÍN ARRESE Juana Isabel (2009). Commitment and subjectivity in the discourse of a judicial inquiry. In *Modality in English*, Raphael SALKIE, Pierre BUSUTIL, Johan VAN DER AUWERA (eds.), 237-268. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- MARÍN ARRESE Juana Isabel (2011). Effective vs. epistemic stance and subjectivity in political discourse. Legitimising strategies and mystification of responsibility. In *Critical Discourse Studies in Context and Cognition*, Christopher HART (ed.), 193-223. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- MARÍN ARRESE Juana Isabel (2015). Epistemic legitimation and inter/subjectivity in the discourse of parliamentary and public inquiries: A contrastive case study. *Critical Discourse Studies* 12(3), 261-278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2015.1013484>.
- MARÍN ARRESE Juana Isabel (2021). Winds of war: Epistemic and effective control in political discourse on war. *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación/Culture, Language and Representation* Vol. XXV, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.6035/clr.5858>.
- MEADOWS Cui Zhang, TANG Lu, ZOU Wenxue (2022). Managing government legitimacy during the COVID-19 pandemic in China: A semantic network analysis

- of state-run media Sina Weibo posts. *Chinese Journal of Communication* 15(2), 156–181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2021.2016876>.
- MPOFU Shepherd (ed.). (2021). *Digital Humour in the COVID-19 Pandemic. Perspectives from the Global South*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- OCHS Elinor (1996). Linguistic resources for socialising humanity. In *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*, John J. GUMPERZ, Stephen C. LEVINSON (eds.), 407–437. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- REYES Antonio (2011). Strategies of legitimisation in political discourse: From words to actions. *Discourse & Society* 22(6), 781–801. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926511419927>.
- SWALES John M. (1990). *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- TSUI Amy B.M. (1991). The pragmatic functions of ‘I don’t know’. *TEXT* 11(4), 607–622. <https://doi.org/10.1515/text.1.1991.11.4.607>.
- VAN LEEUWEN Theo (2007). Legitimation in discourse and communication. *Discourse & Communication* 1(1), 91–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481307071986>.
- WEBER Max (1968). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, vol. 2. New York, NY: Bedminster Press.
- WILLIAMS Jamie, WRIGHT David (2022). Ambiguity, responsibility and political action in the UK daily COVID-19 briefings. *Critical Discourse Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2022.2110132>.

Magdalena Szczyrbak
Institute of English Studies
Jagiellonian University in Kraków
al. Adama Mickiewicza 9a
31-120 Kraków
Poland
Department of English and American Studies
University of Pardubice
Studentská 84
532 10 Pardubice
Czech Republic
[magdalena.szczyrbak\(at\)uj.edu.pl](mailto:magdalena.szczyrbak(at)uj.edu.pl)

Anna Tereszkievicz
Institute of English Studies
Jagiellonian University in Kraków
al. Adama Mickiewicza 9a
31-120 Kraków
Poland
[anna.tereszkievicz\(at\)uj.edu.pl](mailto:anna.tereszkievicz(at)uj.edu.pl)