Comparing News Articles: Why *Breaking News English (BNE)* May Not Be an Authentic Resource

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Recently *Breaking News English (BNE)* has been suggested by many EFL teachers as a convenient and useful resource for high-level English classes, which consist of high intermediate students who want to study authentic English texts to improve their vocabulary, reading, and speaking skills as well as cultural awareness. The aim of this study is to compare and contrast a *BNE* article with a comparable story from a mainstream news source in order to see how authentic the *BNE* article was. The comparison stemmed from the need to uncover whether *BNE* was a suitable resource for teachers seeking authentic reading materials for their high level language classes. For the study, we used three points of comparison to decide whether *BNE* could be considered a source for authentic news stories. These three points were the articles’ Narrative Structures, Underlying Ideologies, and Portrayals of the Social Actors. The study has revealed that although *BNE* is an excellent resource for teachers, it might not necessarily offer a good example of an authentic news article.

I. INTRODUCTION

Krashen (1993) argues “reading is the only way, the only way, we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammar, and the only way we become good spellers” (p. 23). Since reading is so beneficial to language development, reading tasks have been considered

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as the basis for a new high level EFL course. In 2011, an English language teaching department planned to implement EFL courses for Korean university students. After a series of discussion, it decided to stop using usual English language textbooks, for instance, *Breakthrough* (published by MacMillan ELT) and *Summit* (published by Longman) series for every rotation, and introduce *American English File* (published by Oxford University Press) for the shorter vacation courses.

Unfortunately, although *Breakthrough* and *Summit* together provide a book for each of the six levels, *American English File* has only four suitable texts, meaning that the high intermediate classes would have no suitable textbooks. The aims were clear with this level at that time: students should read newspaper articles, not only to introduce new vocabulary and grammar structures, but also to generate conversation and debate within the classroom. The students would also be exposed to wider cultural knowledge, practice garnering meaning from context, and gain an understanding of authentic English language texts. However, teachers had to consider the reality of this proposal. It was this discussion which led to the suggestion of using *Breaking News English* (*BNE*). *BNE* is a website with free EFL newspaper lessons (www.breakingnewsenglish.com) and offers a number of useful graded news articles (Eastment, 2007; Hung, 2009; Nurmukhamedov & Sadler, 2010; Teng, 2011). According to Sean Banville (2011), the site creator of the *BNE*, the website offers useful free lesson plans and graded news articles and communicative activities. Every three days a new article is written by the site creator and uploaded; the site also provides warm ups, vocabulary practice, and pre- and post-reading activities, so teachers can select what to use. In other words, the lessons are ready made and very convenient to use. However, the question is often not about convenience, but authenticity in the high level classes.

Many English language teachers use English news articles during their classes because they provide a variety of authentic English texts and are easily accessible, which means the classes can be tailored to students' interests. Furthermore, high level students would be motivated by topical, relevant articles which would give them "first-hand experience of how language is used in genuine communicative situations beyond the classroom."
(Nunan, 1999, p. 79). Although the BNE website offers a number of useful graded news articles, we were uncertain whether BNE articles were suitable for high level Korean EFL classes or not. In order to answer this question, we selected two news articles addressing the same event from BNE and Reuters for a close analysis of their narrative structures, the ideologies which shaping the reports, and their representations of social actors. We used Reuters as an authentic English language news resource because it is one of the most well-known international news agencies (van Dijk, 1988).

Having carefully selected articles regarding the death of Muammar Gaddafi of Libya from BNE, we chose a story with the same topic from Reuters. The headline for BNE read: 'Gaddafi Death a Lesson to Tyrants' (Banville, 2011) while Reuters was: 'Arabs See Gaddafi's Death as Lesson to Other Tyrants' (Aboudi, 2011). These articles provided the good opportunity to see how they are compared and just how authentic a BNE article was. In the following sections, we will review and discuss the two articles from various angles.

II. NEWSPAPER AS NARRATIVE

Bell (1999) claims "journalists do not write articles... they write stories" (p. 236). Newspaper stories, like any story, have certain established structures. The classical story tends to reach a climax in a largely chronological fashion, resolving the action near the end. Labov and Waletsky (1967) proposed that this kind of traditional narrative has six parts: the Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Result, and Coda. Labov (1999) reports that the Abstract explains what the tale is about and then the Orientation answers the important 4W questions: Who, When, Where, and What. The Complicating Action describes what happened next and the Evaluation reveals why the story is important. The Result summarizes what finally happened, and the Coda, which is not always essential, returns the reader to the present in order to thoroughly conclude the story.

Newspaper articles contain many of these similar elements as they retell their stories. However, the structure is less straightforward since the most important information as selected by the news staff—is inserted as early as
possible into the story in order to maximize the impact of the story, often ignoring chronology. Bell (1999) notes “this willful violation of our expectations that narratives usually proceed in temporal succession... and is distinctive to news stories” (p. 242). Instead the story moves forward and back through time in a non-linear manner according their perceived news values, the points considered most important are found in the lead, which is the first sentence. Thus, the further we read through the story, the less the important information may be considered.

Unlike the paced structure of Labov and Waletsky (1967)’s regular narratives, in news articles the Abstract, Orientation, Action, Evaluation and Result can be found condensed into the lead. In many cases, the headline and the lead together provide the Abstract and the Orientation by summarizing the main action and explaining the 4Ws. The main Action can be also found here, but this is often expanded on later in the story, as are other less important actions. If there is any resolution at all to be found in the story, it also can be found in the lead, but often the newspaper story is more ‘soap opera’ than a ‘stand-alone episode’ as it “is only the latest step in a continuing saga” (Bell, 1999, p. 242). Subsequently, there can be no Coda to end story, particularly since the final paragraph—or indeed half the story—could be cut by the editor before publishing.

III. Reuters and BNE: A COMPARISON IN NARRATIVE

Table 1 compares and contrasts the narratives of Reuters and BNE. Copies of the full stories can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B. It is important to note that the BNE story is not written in the traditional format of the newspaper where one or two sentence usually equate to a paragraph. However, for the purposes of comparison, each sentence in BNE has been analyzed as a paragraph.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Structure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Reuters</th>
<th>BNE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
<td>Summary of important action</td>
<td>Many Arabs believe that Gaddafi’s death is a lesson to tyrants</td>
<td>Gaddafi’s death is a lesson to tyrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The 4Ws: Who, Where, When, What</td>
<td>• Who: Arabs, Gaddafi, other dictators</td>
<td>• Who: Gaddafi, other tyrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>• When: 2011</td>
<td>• When: Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Where: Arab region</td>
<td>• Where: Sirte; the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What: Gaddafi’s capture and killing is a lesson</td>
<td>• What: Gaddafi’s death is a lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Who: other Arabs, rebels, Ziad Khalil, Youssef Hammad, fighters,</td>
<td>• Who: a mob, Obama, Zine al-Abidine Ben Al, Honsi Mubarak, many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>National Transitional Council, PM Mahmoud Jabril, Libyans, Libyan</td>
<td>Arabs, Ziad Khalil, Haji Ismail, Sarif al-Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>officials, Egyptian cabinet, Arab governments, Zine al-Abidine Ben Al,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Honsi Mubarak, Haji Ismail, Ibrahim Sabri, President Bashar al-Assad,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Syrian people, NATO, Suleiman Al Sharji, Amr Moussa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• When: today, Friday, Thursday, August, February, January</td>
<td>• When: February, January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Where: Libya, Tripoli, Beirut, Cairo, Sirte, a drainage culvert,</td>
<td>• Where: a hole, USA, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Yemen,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Yemen, Oman, Houla</td>
<td>Beirut, Oman, Zetlin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What: Some think Libya better off if Gaddafi had had a trial;</td>
<td>• What: Obama’s warming; circumstances of death;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>circumstances</td>
<td>consequences of death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The effect of Gaddafi's death on an unstable area: Arabs' opinions

Obama’s warning and two local opinions

See APPENDIX A

See APPENDIX B

Other tyrannical leaders should beware

Other tyrannical leaders should beware

Reuter’s article is an example of a traditional news story. The majority of the information is compressed into the first sentences and is accurately summarized in the headline. The body of the text expands on the topic and adds many more people, groups, places, and times to the story, providing a wealth of evidence and background to support the evaluation. With 684 words, it is longer than a typical print story, but it is worth noting that the second half could be easily cut without any loss to the 'newsworthiness' of the news article. On the other hand, the BNE story disregards several of the rules for news articles. For example, instead of a collection of standard sentence–paragraphs, the story is presented in around two 120–word paragraphs (more specifically 250 words without the title). In the first, the lead doubles as a topic sentence with the following sentences supporting it. The second paragraph follows this same pattern. This was possibly a conscious decision by the author in order to make the article simpler for language students.

Another difference in the narrative structure between the articles is their use of time. In Reuters, the journalist shifts the action forward and back in time in typical non-linear newspaper fashion (see Appendix A for time structure analysis). In the lead, the reporter generalizes about the event of the year 2011 (T1), and then moves specifically to August (T3). Next, the story shifts to the present day (T5) and then back to the previous day (T4). The story alternates between these times, while also jumping back to the beginning of the year briefly to explore the background (T2). Bell (1999)
notes that this “is a common principle of news writing, that it is not the action or the process which takes priority but the outcome” (pp. 241–242). Conspicuously absent in the BNE story’s orientation is ‘when’: in fact, time signposts are absent for most of the article, bar a brief mention of events back in January and February at the start of the second paragraph. The only other time expression used is ongoing, which is unspecific, suggesting past, present, and future.

The BNE article has been written often ignoring journalistic time techniques possibly because it is aimed at second language learners: hence it might rather focus on the story. An authentic news article is read in the days after it is written, so the reader would understand the time markers. If a teacher prepared a lesson with this article and did it more than a week after the event, then the time information within the story could confuse the students. BNE has avoided this by providing little or no information about when events occurred, leaving that to the teacher. These choices by BNE to alter the news article, both in the use of time and the paragraph structure, may make the article easier for low level students, but are largely unnecessary for the higher levels. For example, either pre-reading discussions about Libya’s problems or a post-reading task to reconstruct the timeline of events could be incorporated into the class to assist students’ understanding of the complex, non-linear newspaper structure, and for those activities the authentic Reuters article provides the most information.

IV. NEWS IDEOLOGIES

Van Dijk (1988) argues that newspaper editors have “values, norms, beliefs, and attitude schemata that underlie their professional routines of news selection and production” (p. 38). In a similar vein, White (1997) notes “the ‘hard news’ report inflects the events it describes with cultural and ideological meanings... it acts to construct and to naturalize a model of social stability, morality and normalcy” (p. 101). These values were sketched out by Galtung and Ruge (1965) in a list of twelve critical factors that affect which events are considered newsworthy: Frequency, Threshold, Unambiguity, Meaningfulness, Consonance, Unexpectedness, Continuity,
Composition, Reference to Elite Nations, Reference to Elite People, Reference to Persons, and Reference to Something Negative. In the case of the two Gaddafi articles, several of these factors are clearly evident. First, since the story of the West's involvement in Libya had been news for several months, the articles are examples of continuity. Once a story has headlined and been defined as news, "it will continue to be defined as news for some time even if the amplitude is drastically reduced" (Flower, 1991, pp. 14–15). Secondly, both stories revolve around an Elite Person: Gaddafii. Flower (1991) describes elite people as 'notable paradigms' and Gaddafii had become the good example of a lavish tyrant after it was revealed that he had hired numerous American pop stars to entertain his family. Another factor apparent is Meaningfulness. Although Libya is a North African country, which means it does not have cultural proximity to the United States, it does have relevance because of Western involvement, which also provides a fourth factor: Reference to Elite Nations. In Reuters, this is indicated by the mentions of NATO. NATO is not mentioned in the BNE article; instead it uses Obama to link the story to Western interests.

Van Dijk (1988) expands on Galtung and Ruge (1965)'s model, by pointing out that there are also "news value frameworks" (p. 39) that help determine the selection of foreign news. He proposes that many reported events fit into well-known models and are instances of general knowledge scripts, such as civil wars, or attitude schemata, like Arab countries (Van Dijk, 1988). Van Dijk's examples actually fit well with the Gaddafi articles: both describe the aftermath of the civil war in Libya, a member state of the Arab league. Despite there being no natural reason why negativity should be more newsworthy than triumphs, negativity tends to get more press (Flower, 1991) and it is here that the two articles differ in their news values. BNE focuses on the positive side of Gaddafi's death since it heralds a change for the Libyan people and also for the region as a whole. This is indicated by such expressions as 'lesson to tyrants', 'any dictator can be overthrown', 'iron-fisted rule inevitably comes to an end', other leaders 'will face such a fate' and 'a new and democratic Libya'.

 Reuters uses similar language: 'lesson to other tyrants', 'lesson to other Arab rulers', and 'likely to scare Arab leaders still clinging to power'.

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However, it presents a second, more negative perspective with the reports that others think 'Libya would have been better off if its former leader had been given a fair trial' and 'the success of the Libyan uprising would have been more welcome had NATO forces not been involved'. Reuters presents both positives and negatives to the civil war aftermath, and adds the voices of people who are celebrating and also, to a lesser extent, those concerned about the leader's death. This type of article can be good in the classroom as it provides more scope for discussion and even debate between students. The teacher can ask students to consider whether Gaddafi's beating and subsequent death was warranted or not; the presentation of two different viewpoints in the story gives students some insight into how people of the region feel before voicing their own opinions, whereas the information in BNE suggests only that the death of Gaddafi is positive.

V. SOCIAL ACTORS

Another area of interest when studying newspaper articles is their depiction of the social actors, the people mentioned within the story. A glance back at Table 1 shows that there are many different social actors mentioned in Reuters' article, although there are significantly fewer in BNE. Social actors can be categorized by how they are represented within the story. Van Leeuwen (1996) suggests two types of categorization: Functionalization and Identification. According to van Leeuwen (1996), Functionalization is used to describe the actors by what they do; in other words, their job or role in the story while Identification connects the person to what "they more or less permanently, or unavoidably, are" (p. 54) which can be subcategorized into Classification, Relational Identification, and Physical Identification. Classification is how society divides its members into groups, such as by gender, age, or race, while Relational Identification is how social actors relate to others, like kinship ties or work connections. The third subcategory, Physical Representation uses a description of the social actor which registers them as unique. The higher importance of Functionalization derives from the largely Western ideal that occupation is most important and Classification is needed only when the social actor is not part of the
readership's community. These ideas are clearly evidenced in both news articles as shown in Table 2 and Table 3 separately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Actor</th>
<th>Functionalization</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Relational Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muammar Gaddafi</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Arab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barack Obama</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali</td>
<td>Fallen Arab leader</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosni Mubarak</td>
<td>Fallen Arab Leader</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziad Khalil</td>
<td>Shop Keeper</td>
<td>Beirut</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haji Ismail</td>
<td>Banker</td>
<td>Oman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saif al-Islam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gaddafi's second son</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Actor</th>
<th>Functionalization</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Relational Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muammar Gaddafi</td>
<td>Former Leader</td>
<td>Arab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziad Khalil</td>
<td>Shop Keeper</td>
<td>Beirut</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youssef Hammad</td>
<td>Business Executive</td>
<td>Cairo, 43-year-old</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahmoud Jibril</td>
<td>Interim Prime</td>
<td>Libya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali</td>
<td>Ousted Head of State</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosni Mubarak</td>
<td>Ousted Head of State</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haji Ismail</td>
<td>Banker</td>
<td>Oman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibrahim Sabri</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Cairo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bashar al-Assad</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suleiman Al Sharji</td>
<td>Political Commentator</td>
<td>Oman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amr Moussa</td>
<td>Secretary General</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reuters* and *BNE* present their social actors in much a similar way. Because *Reuters* article is significantly longer (684 words compared to 250 words), there are more individuals referenced. However, both news articles use Functionalization (their job) and Classification (nationality and/or their place of residence). This has been done to place the speaker in the speaker in the real world and as evidence of the veracity of the report (Caldas-Coulthard, 1994). In *Reuters*, the use of their country validates
them as Arabs who are therefore entitled to have an opinion about what is occurring in the region. Reuters also allows for a range of people to speak, from a shop keeper to a political commentator and also permits both positive and negative reactions to the death of Gaddafi. BNE uses five of the same individuals in its article. Three of them are voiceless (Gaddafi, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, and Hosni Mubarak); it gives just two 'commoners' a chance to speak, and both of them reinforce the words of the important social actor, the United States' President. As van Dijk (1988) observed "minority representatives will seldom be allowed to speak alone" (p. 39). Khahlil and Hammad's voices are just echoes of Obama's speech and so are placed accordingly at the end of the story.

Caldas-Coulthard (1996) argues "many readers choose to read a story only if the headline attracts their attention" (p. 257). It is interesting to note that Reuters' and BNE's headlines appear similar, yet are noticeably different in their use of social actors. BNE claims: 'Gaddafi's death a lesson to tyrants', while Reuters says: 'Arabs see Gaddafi's death as a lesson to their tyrants'. Although all words from BNE headline appear in Reuters' headline, the absence of four words changes the meaning considerably. In Reuters, it is clear who believes the death is a warning: Arabs. In BNE, there is no apparent social actor acknowledged; it is not clear who the headline is quoting. Even reading the first sentences of the article the 'who' of the headline is not clarified. Obama confirms the idea, but the article says he '... led those warning other autocrats that their days might be numbered'. Again the reader may ask who are 'those'? In fact, it is not clear until almost the end of the article that the quote from the headline is accredited to anyone, Omani banker, Haji Ismail.

Social actors are not only individuals, but also groups, and again the two articles handle these in different ways. Reuters contains many more references to the people and groups involved in the Libyan conflict, providing more background in the text. Both articles talk about Arabs as though the region is united as a "homogeneous, consensual group" (Leeuwen, 1996, p. 50), but BNE only makes one other reference to a different group: the mob which found Gaddafi. Meanwhile, Reuters mentions rebels, fighters, the National Transitional Council, Libyans, Libyan officials, the Egyptian cabinet,
Arab governments, Syrian people, and NATO. It is important to note one major difference in language referring to the same group of people. Reuters refers to the people who found Gaddafi as ‘fighters for the National Transitional Council’, whereas BNE uses a far more emotive word: mob. It is interesting because ‘fighter’ is actually a simpler word for EFL students, but BNE has consciously gone with a word which suggests anarchy. This is a stark contrast to the language used to describe Obama, where he is depicting leading others and pointing Libya to a new, free democratic future. By comparison, Reuters’ article is a little more balanced and informative about the people involved. However, both articles employ negative appraisement regarding Gaddafi himself with expressions like bloodied, humiliated, fleeing, hiding, and ‘a rat’.

Obama is absent from the Reuters article, possibly because he warranted to a separate story of his own as an elite person, but his voice is not the only one absent. In fact, there is one particular group of social actors completely removed from both articles. It would be particularly interesting as a teacher to see if students could answer this question: which group of people who are equally affected by the death of Gaddafi have no voice or direct reference within the article? As Caldas–Coulthard (1993) points out “quality newspapers see women as a minority group that is marginalized as being denied the role of speakers” (p. 206). It is uncertain whether interviewer has not asked any women to comment or no women were allowed to speak. In addition, it is somewhat surprising that Reuters and BNE have grouped all Arab countries together into the same radical, patriarchal category no matter their country.

VI. CONCLUSION

Fowler (1991) notes that nearly all meanings are socially constructed, that all discourse is both a social product and a social practice, and therefore that all discourse is better understood if subjected to critical linguistic analysis. He further highlights that newspapers are “a major element of our daily experience of language” (p. 9). This latter statement can be a major reason why newspapers are useful in the classroom: they are authentic texts and
learning how to read them provides students with useful tools. Lessons can be built around many aspects of the text, such as language, grammatical structures, writing practice, reading comprehension, and discussion. However, beyond the practice of these obvious language skills, the teacher also needs to help students understand the layers beyond the lexis and syntax.

On the surface level, BNE seems the better article for the classroom: the language and grammar is simplified and lesson ideas and worksheets are provided. It is also a relatively short, written in the form of two simple paragraphs, with one rather clear message. However, looking specifically at the two example texts, the narrative structure and presentation of BNE is not necessarily authentic. Important time markers are completely absent from the article. The article also presents its viewpoint as consensual from the President of the United States to a local Arab shopkeeper. The headline itself presents this as indisputable fact.

On the other hand, the Reuters article is not flawless, but its flaws are possibly what makes it an authentic text and again possibly a good piece of writing for high level students to study, offering interesting cultural aspects to the class. It follows the universal structure of the English language news article with its orientation answering all questions about Who, Where, When and What. It also presents a variety of people’s viewpoints, including those who do not wholeheartedly agree with idea presented in the orientation. Although it may seem significantly longer than the BNE article, its length allows it to include information from a wider range of social actors and organizations and expand on the important events in the story's timeline. Certainly, it is a linguistically complicated piece of text, which may be daunting for both the teacher and students, but learning to understand a real piece of journalism is a skill students can be proud of since it has real world applications.

As Nunan (1999) points out, a good reading task uses authentic and challenging pieces; however, a thorough reading task lets "students learn to be critical in their reading of a text" (p. 262). Guided by some of the discourse analysis techniques discussed in this study, the teacher can help students to not only understand the subject of a specific article, such as the effect of Gaddafi's death on a region, but also arm them with the skills to
tackle a range of English language news articles that interest them by considering the structure of the article, the ideology behind its publication, and the way social actors are presented or ignored. These issues can be discussed and practiced through a variety of tasks in class with inexhaustible source material from news websites and papers. All these skills to deal with genuine language will help the students “cope successfully with genuine communication outside the classroom” (Nunan, 1999, p. 80).

REFERENCES


Arabs see Gaddafi’s death as lesson to other tyrants

By Sami Aboudi

DUBAI | Oct 21, 2011 | 7:49am EDT

(Reuters) - For many Arabs, the humiliating capture and killing of Muammar Gaddafi, the longest-serving Arab leader, is a lesson to other tyrants in a region that has overthrown three long-serving rulers this year.

But some said on Friday that Libya would have been better off if its former leader had been given a fair trial for abuses committed during his 42-year rule, which ended when rebels captured the capital Tripoli in August.

“The world now has one less dictator,” said Fadhl Al-Nia, a Beirut shopkeeper, a day after Gaddafi’s death. “This is the end he deserves.”

In Cairo, Yousef Hammod, a 45-year-old business executive, said he was not surprised by Gaddafi’s gruesome demise.

“The way he was going to die, if caught, was sealed when he ignored his people’s calls for a more open and free society,” Hammod said. “Instead he vowed to hunt them down one by one,alleyway by alleyway, like rats. Ironically that’s how he met his maker.”

Gaddafi, a logistic since August, was killed on Thursday after fighters for the National Transitional Council captured his last stronghold and hometown of Sirte.

He tried to flee the city in a convoy, brazenly using NATO aircraft. His captors found him hiding in a drainage culvert, and cell phone video showed a bloodied Gaddafi being beaten.

Libya’s interim Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril said that Gaddafi was hit during “cruelness” while being taken to hospital, but most Libyans, including officials, seemed to have little doubt that he was probably killed by his captors.

The Egyptian cabinet said after a meeting on Thursday it was looking forward to helping the Libyan people rebuild their country. But most Arab governments have yet to comment on Gaddafi’s death.

Gaddaffi was the third Arab head of state to be ousted this year, after Tunisia’s Zine al-Abidine Ben Al and Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak.

But unlike Ben Al and Mubarak, who were ousted by popular uprisings in January and February, Gaddafi was overthrown in a civil war that the new interim government says cost some 30,000 lives.

Many Arabs said Gaddafi’s death was likely to scare Arab leaders still clinging to power in Syria and Yemen in the face of months of pro-democracy protests and crackdowns by security forces that have left thousands of people dead.

In the Syrian capital Damascus, a banner on a wall said Gaddafi’s death was a “lesson to all Arab rulers.” “They will face such a fate if they keep oppressing their peoples.”

Cairo engineer Ibrahim Safadi said Arab leaders were afraid of meeting a similar fate.

“This was evident in the Syrian TV denial of Gaddafi’s death,” said Safadi. “They are afraid that they will share the same fate,” he said.

In Syria, where President Bashar al-Assad has faced seven months of popular protests opposing his rule, video footage of a demonstration on Thursday night in Homs province showed people chanting: “Bashar, it is your turn next!”

In the Syrian town of Houla, people carried placards saying: “Syrian rebels congratulate the Libyan people for killing the rat Muammar Gaddafi,” and “Death is the fate of all oppressive rulers - first the rat Muammar Gaddafi, then the thug Bashar al-Assad.”

Some said the success of the Libyan uprising would have been more welcome had NATO forces not been involved.

NATO deployed aircraft to protect Libyan civilians against Gaddafi forces in a U.N.-mandated operation, but the alliance took a visible role in the fighting that ousted Gaddafi.

“I would have been a triumph for all Arabs if Libyans themselves removed Gaddafi without NATO help,” said Sulaiman al-Sharq, an Omani political commentator. “Now we have more questions on foreign interference as versus self-rule than ever before.”

Amm Moussa, a former Arab League Secretary General who helped set up the Arab League in 1945, said he hoped that Libya will move forward quickly to achieve the goals of its people.

“A people that will live after Gaddaffi’s departure into a new phase toward the building of a modern Libya and achieving stability and real democracy,” the independent Egyptian daily al-Tahrir newspaper quoted Amm Moussa as saying.

(Additional reporting by Shamil Zaidi, Mahe Dahan and Omar Fahmy in Cairo, Salih Al-Sharq in Muscat; Esam Algersan in Beirut)
APPENDIX B: BNE Article

Gaddafi Death a "Lesson to Tyrants"

The death of Muammar Gaddafi on a street of his hometown Sirte is a lesson to tyrants around the world that any dictator can be overthrown. The humiliating nature of Gaddafi's death, being found hiding in a hole next to a roadside and then set upon by a mob, serves as a stark contrast to the lavish lifestyle he led in his 42-year rule. U.S. President Barack Obama led those warning other autocrats that their days might be numbered. He warned that “iron-fisted rule inevitably comes to an end.” He said Gaddafi's death “marks the end of a long and painful chapter for the people of Libya who now have the opportunity to determine their own destiny in a new and democratic Libya”.

Gaddafi is the third and longest-serving Arab leader to fall from power this year, following Tunisia’s Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in January and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak a month later. Ongoing unrest in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen threaten to topple leaders in those countries. Many Arabs believe Gaddafi's end will scare other leaders clinging to power. Ziad Khallil, a Beirut shopkeeper, said of Gaddafi: "The world now has one less dictator. This is the end he deserves". In the Omani capital Muscat, banker Hall Imsil said Gaddafi's death was a lesson to other Arab rulers. "They will face such a fate if they keep oppressing their people," he said. Meanwhile, reports are emerging that Saif al-Islam, Gaddafi’s second son, has been captured in the Libyan city of Zeltin.

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