

Teaching Unit 22: News and Reality

Background

This unit explores the link between news and reality. It provides materials for teachers and students to reflect on how language succeeds or fails to build credibility and how newswriters attempt to frame reality for readers. Students might focus narrowly on aspects of language or take a more ‘multimodal’ approach where they reflect on the language as well as features such as layout, font choices, imagery, and reputation of news outlets.

Discussion points

Verifiability and accuracy

It is generally agreed that media products branded as “news” should be based in reality. The individual facts should be true, and the whole story should be accepted as an accurate reflection of reality. However, in practice individual readers and viewers often choose how much of the news they want to believe.

Below are some examples from regional newspapers. For each of them, do you think the claim or implied claim is:

- a) definitely true
- b) probably true
- c) probably not true
- d) definitely not true?

Click through to read the whole story before you reply. Explain your reasoning in as much detail as you can for each one. Then consider:

- What factors influence how likely you are to believe the news?
- What about the way the headlines and leads are worded?
- Are there any cues to signal how reliable the information is?

Essex Police investigate 'lion' sighting near St Osyth

27 August 2012

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Police in Essex are investigating reports that a lion was spotted in a field at St Osyth near Clacton-on-Sea.

The animal was seen near Earls Hall Drive by holidaymaker Bob Martin at about 19:00 BST on Sunday.

Mr Martin said he and his wife Denise saw a large cat and a lion "was the first thing that came to mind".

Colchester Zoo experts have said a definite identification of the animal was not

- a) definitely true
- b) probably true
- c) probably not true
- d) definitely not true

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-19388301>

Teenager spots UFO over Ipswich

PUBLISHED: 12:55 18 July 2008 | UPDATED: 11:27 09 March 2010

AN Ipswich teenager had a close encounter of the mysterious kind in Cardinal Park when she saw what she believed was a UFO.



Charlotte Bevan

Charlotte Bevan, 18, Foxhall Road was picking her older sister up from Cineworld on Sunday night when she spotted a bright orange light hovering above her.

Miss Bevan's bizarre sighting is just one of hundreds reported across the country in the last few weeks.

Normally sceptical about the unexplained, she couldn't believe what she was seeing.

She said: "I looked up and saw a bright orange blob in the sky. It was moving from left to right and not making any sound. Then it drifted out of my sight behind the cinema."

- a) definitely true
- b) probably true
- c) probably not true
- d) definitely not true

<http://www.ipswichstar.co.uk/news/teenager-spots-ufo-over-ipswich-1-165542>

21st International Gilbert & Sullivan Festival could mean £1 million boost for Harrogate

Published: 11:43
Thursday 20 June 2013

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One of the UK's biggest annual theatre festivals is coming to Harrogate next year in a move which is expected bring thousands of visitors and a potential boost of over £1m to local businesses.

Organisers of the 21st International Gilbert & Sullivan Festival signed the contract yesterday which will bring the three-week spectacle to Yorkshire in 2014, with an option to extend the deal.

Simon Kent, [director](#) of Harrogate International Centre and The Royal Hall, said: "It's hard to overstate just how fantastic this announcement is, not just for Harrogate but for the whole district.

"We will be welcoming visitors from as far away as America and Australia, so it's fantastic we are able to offer them venues such as Harrogate Theatre

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comments



HAVE
YOUR SAY

- a) definitely true
- b) probably true
- c) probably not true
- d) definitely not true

<https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/news/21st-international-gilbert-sullivan-festival-could-mean-1-million-boost-for-harrogate-1-5784893>

Selection and interpretation

The exercise above demonstrated that there are “facts” that are difficult or impossible to verify but that get reported anyway.

There are also facts that can be verified in the sense that they are attested to in documents or by eyewitnesses, but nevertheless they can be interpreted very differently.

Below are the opening portions of two stories about the official economic growth figures for the UK in the last three months of 2017. Both have the same figures from the Office of National Statistics, but they spin them differently. The *Telegraph* says the economy “defies gloom” based on the quarterly growth number and the *Guardian* acknowledges that the quarterly growth figure is better than expected, while also noting that it is not evenly distributed. (Discuss: In two-part headlines do you think the first part or the second affects your impression more? Why might that be?) The *Guardian* also notes that annual growth is the slowest since 2012, adding to the downbeat impression of its presentation.

These headlines fit with the widely held perception of the *Telegraph* as a newspaper that supports business and economic interests that depend on economic growth, and the *Guardian* as a newspaper that is critical of business and concerned with inequality. If you compare stories like these with the original ONS report [<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-gdp-preliminary-estimate-oct-to-dec-2017>] and with other economic reports, you will see that most financial periods have a mix of positive and negative results, and a selection must be made to fit into the limited space of a news story. Perspectives can also change over time. As new figures are announced, these figures may be reinterpreted as better or worse than they were at first.

Business

UK economy defies gloom with 1.8pc growth in 2017



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The finance and business services sectors boosted growth in the fourth quarter of the year



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By **Ayesha Javed**, senior business reporter
26 JANUARY 2018 - 10:58AM

Britain's economy grew faster than expected in the last three months of 2017, although its annual growth was still the lowest in five years.

UK GDP rose 0.5pc in the fourth quarter and 1.8pc in the full year compared with 2016, according to preliminary figures from the Office of National Statistics.

Growth was driven by the dominant services sector, with business services and finance helping to boost the sector by 0.6pc compared to the third quarter.

Economists had forecast growth to be 0.4pc in the fourth quarter and 1.4pc for the year.

The ONS said: "Despite services growth in the most recent quarter, quarterly growth compared with the same quarter a year ago showed a weakening, particularly in the more domestic consumer-facing type sectors."

Those consumer-facing sectors include hotels, catering, transport, storage and communications. Within those, the accommodation, motor trades and film industry were particularly weak.

Industry recorded 0.6pc growth thanks to another strong quarterly showing by the manufacturing sector. Growth could have been higher but for a "significant fall" in oil and gas extraction due to an outage in supply from the Forties pipeline from the North Sea. Across the year, industry grew 2pc.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2018/01/26/uk-economy-defies-gloom-18pc-growth-2017/>

Richard Partington

Fri 26 Jan 2018 10:32 GMT

UK GDP beats forecasts but growth remains uneven

ONS puts quarterly growth at 0.5% but warns annual pace is slowest since 2012



▲ Weaker consumer spending held back growth. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

The British economy grew at a faster rate than expected in the final three months of 2017, despite pockets of weaker and more uneven growth triggered by the Brexit vote.

GDP grew by 0.5% in the fourth quarter after expansion of 0.4% in the previous three months, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS). City economists had forecast growth of 0.4%.

Q&A

What is gross domestic product (GDP)?



However, officials said the rate of expansion for the year as a whole was the slowest since 2012, having fallen from 1.9% in 2016 to 1.8%. The ONS also said the bigger picture showed weaker and more uneven expansion.

Darren Morgan of the ONS said the boost to the economy came from recruitment agencies, letting agents and office management, adding that there was slow and unsteady growth elsewhere, particularly in consumer-facing sectors.

The UK has suffered over the past year as rising inflation prompted by the slide in the value of the pound after the EU referendum outstrips weak wage growth, denting the spending power of consumers.

"Despite a slight uptick in the latest quarter, the underlying picture is of slower and uneven growth across the economy," he said.

Hotels, caterers and transport and distribution firms recorded weaker growth owing to constraints on consumer spending, the ONS said. There was also weaker growth across the car industry and for cinemas.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/jan/26/uk-gdp-grows-faster-than-expected-ONS>

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