News Narrative Construction of the May 19 Crackdown as Reported on CNN Online: A Semiotic Analysis

Narumol Chantrasupawong

Lecturer, Department of Business English
School of Humanities
University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce
E-mail: narumolutcc@hotmail.com

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ เพื่อศึกษาการประกอบสารีเรื่องเล่าของข่าว โดยข่าวที่นำมาศึกษา เป็นข่าวการสลายการชุมนุมผู้ชุมนุมกลุ่มเสื้อแดงในวันที่ 19 พฤษภาคม 2553 จำนวน 4 ข่าวที่ส่งผ่านข่าว CNN เสนอผ่านเว็บไซต์ CNN.com ถูกที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ คือ ผังแห่งการสื่อสาร (Quest Model) และสี่เหลี่ยมสัญลักษณ์ (Semiotic Square) ขึ้นเป็นแนวคิดของเจอ เภรมัส (A J Greimas) นัก Narratologist ซึ่งได้อธิบายจากฟร็อสต์ตามเดิน เดอ โซซัวร์ (Ferdinand de Suassure) นักคิดแนวโครงสร้างนิยม (Structuralism) การอธิบายถึงโครงสร้างและวิธีการพื้นฐานอันเป็นต้นกำเนิดของเรื่องเล่า และข่าวที่ปรากฏในสื่อต่าง ๆ รวมถึงข่าวการสลายการชุมนุมผู้ชุมนุมกลุ่มเสื้อแดงในวันที่ 19 พฤษภาคม 2553 นอกจากนี้ การอธิบายถึงสิ่งนี้ยังตอบข้อและผลิตข้อมูลความคิด
A News Narrative Construction of the May 19 Crackdown as Reported on CNN Online: A Semiotic Analysis

Abstract

Since news is a narrative, this paper aims to study its construction. Four online news reports from the CNN.com website about the crackdown on the “Red Shirts” protracted demonstrations in Bangkok on May 19, 2010 are selected for this study. The “quest model” and “semiotic square” are used to analyze how the news is constructed. These are proposed by A J Greimas, whose ideas are influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of Structuralism. Understanding its deep structure and its grammar from which the surface structure of the news we read is derived can confirm and reproduce the Thai political ideology that violent means by military forces has always been used on protesters in order to restore peace and return the country to normalcy.

Keywords: News Narrative Construction, May 19 Crackdown, Quest Model, Semiotic Square, Structuralism

Introduction

Bell (1991) and Fulton, et. al (2005) proposed that journalists tell stories professionally and do not write articles but they write stories. They are story tellers of our age. “Getting and writing stories” is what journalists do. (Bell 1991: 141) News writers try to make dry informative news into engaging, absorbing and interesting texts by borrowing storytelling structure and techniques from fiction. News becomes “narrativised” non-fiction, which involves, entertains, informs and persuades readers. Moreover, today’s world is dominated by print and electronic media. “our sense of reality is increasingly structured by narrative.....Print journalism turns daily life into a story”. (Fulton, et. al, 2005: 1)

According to Fowler (1991: 2), news is not facts about the world neutrally reflecting what has happened. It is, rather, a selection of information that is sensational, familiar and timely. There is a complex and artificial set of criteria for selection in order to operate and transform the contents of the news. Fowler also cites Stuart Hall and Greg Philo’s statements about the process of news selection and transformation as follows:
The media do not simply and transparently report events which are ‘naturally’ newsworthy in themselves. ‘News’ is the end product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories. (Hall, et. al, 1980: 53 cited in Fowler, 1991: 12)

Moreover, Philo adds:

“News” on television and in the Press is not self-defining. News is not “found” or even “gathered” so much as made. It is a creation of a journalistic process, an artifact, a commodity even.’ (Philo, 1983: 130-45 cited in Fowler, 1991: 13)

In addition, in an interview by John O’Hara for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s Doubletake broadcast on May 5, 1983, Hall himself answered O’Hara’s question about the US’s own interest in the transmission of news. (The Narrative Construction of Reality, 2011)

“But people have interests in different versions of that event, and any one event can be constructed in a number of different ways, and be made to mean things differently.” that somehow attacks or undermines their (the journalists’)

sense of professional legitimacy, and they (the journalists) very much resist the notion that news is not just an account, but a construction. They resisted that until I think, in the Falklands case, many of them just couldn’t resist it at all, because it was quite clear that different groups had different stakes in the same story.

Thus, it can be concluded that news is constructed. It is the narrative construction of reality.

The news about the crackdown on May 19, 2010 in Bangkok, which is a part of the ongoing political crisis in Thailand, was also reported on media websites worldwide and inevitably follows this concept. Four online news articles about the May 19 crackdown in Bangkok from the CNN website were selected for study. They are Trapped in Bangkok’s protest zone: Hunkering down. Bangkok residents: This is a ‘mini-civil war’, Violence unabated in Thailand and Thailand to prosecute protest leaders. The situation on May 19 was selected to study because it was at its peak after it had been going up and down during April and early May. The events presented on the CNN website have a rough structure which comprises setting, event, and outcome. The situation develops, reaches its climax and resolves like a short
story. After the crackdown by the military troops and police together with the surrender of its leaders, the protest came to an end. People’s lives in Bangkok were almost back to normal. Moreover, as the website claims that it is the world’s most extensive utilized news service, it is interesting to see how the mayhem was reported to their audiences through the eyes of foreign reporters.

Greimas’s quest model and semiotic square were chosen to examine the underlying structures that makeup the news as presented to readers and to understand what social or cultural ideology they can reflect. Both models are influenced by structuralism. Hawkes (2003: 69) clarifies that Greimas’s work “attempts to describe narrative structure in terms of an established linguistic model derived from the Saussurean notion of an underlying langue or competence which generates a specific parole or performance, as well as from Saussure’s and Jacobson’s concept of the fundamental signifying role of binary opposition.”

The quest model and semiotic square are mostly used to analyze fiction like short stories as reviewed below. They are also used to analyze television soap operas and movies. (Vespada, et al., 2008: 132-142 and Suveeranondha, 1997) Using the two models to analyze nonfiction like news in newspapers is rarely found though they can also be applied to analyze media texts. This paper, then, tries to do so; it will include news as another kind of example that can be analyzed by these two models. Here are examples of the articles which apply the two models to analyze Thai short stories.

**Literature Review**

Nopporn Prachakul (1998) analyzed three short stories written by Win Lyovarin, a S.E.A.Write Award winner in 1997, by using the quest model and semiotic square. These three stories collected in ‘The Lament of Scourge’ (Aphet Kamsuan), and published in 1994, are ‘The Last Drop of Ink’ (Muek Yod Sud Thay), ‘Kra Dart Kaw Kub Kaw Muek’ and ‘Ka Dee Ma No Sa Re’. All of them tackle one of the contemporary problems in Thai society, mass manipulation by the media. The quest model confirms that attracting public interest, which leads to higher sales volume, is the most important thing for the news business. Whether the contents of the news are precise or not is not the main concern.

Nopporn elaborated his analysis further by applying the semiotic square to see the relationship between news (nonfiction), and stories (fiction). One of the three stories, ‘Ka Dee Ma No Sa Re’ uses news published in Thairat and Daily News, the two popular newspapers, to be its plot, while the plots of the other two stories are the writer’s imagination.
The semiotic square shows that these three short stories share the same structure. Nopporn concluded that the construction of a short story, fiction, and news report, nonfiction, is alike. News reports are narrativised. They are narrative like stories. Readers perceive texts whether they are news reports or short stories as they are ‘labeled’. These labels form the readers’ perception and attitude.

Pannarai Osathaphiwat (1998) also used the quest model and the semiotic square to analyze one of the collected short stories in ‘Kuntong...You Will Return at Dawn’ (Khun Thong...Chao Ja Krub Mua Fa Sang) entitled ‘On a River at Night’ (Bon Thong Nam Mua Yam Kam) written by Ussiri Dhammachote, a S.E.A.Write Award winner in 1981. In this short story, the proverb ‘what goes around comes around’ is challenged. ‘Good deeds’ and ‘happiness’ are a pair of binary opposition as the former may not lead to the latter. Pannarai used the two models to successfully reveal that a man’s ethical standards can be a barrier preventing him from fulfilling his desire.

‘Brokeback Mountain’. Annie Proulx’s best known short story in the collection ‘Close Range: Wyoming Stories’ was analyzed by Krissada Kamyoung (2008), who applied the semiotic square with his analysis. The story covers a lot of ground, especially regional landscapes like mountain ranges and canyons. This obviously highlights the vital role of ‘space’ in the story. Moreover, this article describes the relationship between gaze and homosexuality behavior. The setting and its exposure to gaze can change the behaviors of the main characters. In the article, the semiotic square helps reveal the two binary oppositions: ‘homosexuality vs. invisible’ and ‘heterosexuality vs. visible’. These two binary oppositions are the underlying grammar that shapes the story.

The analyses of Nopporn Prachakul, Pannarai Osathaphiwat and Krissada Kamyoung on the selected short stories are examples of the application of the quest model and the semiotic square on fiction such as short stories in depth. With the same two models, this paper attempts to analyze news, which is nonfiction, to find its plot paradigm and its underlying structure in order to discover and understand Thai hidden political values.

The Political Situation in Thailand after the 2006 Coup and the May 19 Crackdown

Thailand has been in politically instable and chaotic situation since 2006, a year when the military staged a bloodless coup d’etat. As a result, Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, the prime minister at that time who was well-known for his populist policies, was ousted by the army. In that year a political group who supported Mr. Thaksin but opposed the
military coup d’etat and the military government was formed under the name “Democratic Alliance against Dictatorship” (DADD), and then changed to “The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship” (UDD). The group’s supporters are commonly called “Red shirts.” They mainly consist of poor, rural supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and pro-democracy activists who opposed the military coup d’etat that ousted Mr. Thaksin in 2006. Red color was chosen as the color of the group’s T-shirt uniform. Traditionally red is associated with socialism and communism. The color is also associated with parties of social democracy and their allies within the labour movement. Moreover, some groups supporting the UDD were also charged with lèse majeste (a crime of insulting the monarchy ).

The UDD or the Red shirts organized rallies against the military government in 2006-2007 and in 2008 against the “Yellow shirts,” another political group who was believed to support the 2006 coup d’etat. The Yellow Shirts adopted yellow as its uniform because yellow is the color for Monday in Thailand, the day on which His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej was born. The group make obvious it is loyal to the monarchy. From 2007-2008 Mr. Thaksin’s two allied governments won elections under the People Power Party and then were thwarted by court actions. Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva, who is the leader of the Democrat Party, then took office as the prime minister and was in office from December 2008 to July 2011.

In early April 2009, the Red shirts disrupted the 14th ASEAN summit in Pattaya and caused the summit to be cancelled. In Bangkok they held a mass rally and wreaked havoc across the city. The government declared a state of emergency in Bangkok and surrounding areas. On Monday 13 April, the military forces and police cracked down on the red shirted protesters, which resulted in a number of deaths and injuries on both sides. On 15 April, the Red shirt leaders asked the protesters to leave their protest site and end their rallies.

In February 2010, Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, the ex-prime minister in self-imposed exile was found guilty of abuse of power and unusual wealth while in office. His assets were seized and he was also banned from politics for five years.

In March 2010, the Red shirts held a large scale protest against the Abhisit government and demanded the House dissolution and new elections. In their view, the current government was not democratically elected. Sporadic clashes between government troops and the anti-government protesters were widespread, causing some deaths and injuries. These were reported in local, international and online newspapers. From April 3, 2010, the Red shirts occupied
Rajaprasong, a major commercial area in central Bangkok, and remained in the area from that day until the May 19 crackdown. On May 17, the Abhisit government ordered the protesters to leave the demonstration area by 3 p.m. warning that those who did not do so would face a two-year imprisonment. Still, the protesters held their ground. Clashes between Thai military troops and the protesters continued together with vandalism and shootings. The clashes between the Red shirts and security forces from May 14 to 17 left 35 people dead and over 270 people, including 7 foreigners, injured according to the Erawan Emergency Centre. (“Clashes keep city on edge” 2010: 1). On May 19, the military troops moved to disperse the protesters at the main rally site at Ratchaprasong, forcing the Red shirt leaders to surrender. Shortly after that Bangkok was in chaos. More than ten buildings, including a theatre, shopping malls and a bank were set on fire and looting was widespread around the city. After the military operation at Ratchaprasong, chaos broke out in several Red shirt stronghold provinces in the North and Northeast. The Abhisit government, therefore, announced a curfew as well as imposing an emergency decree in Bangkok and in some provinces. In the mean time buses were provided for the protesters to leave the rally site and return to their homes. The situation later gradually returned to normal.

The May 19 Crackdown News on the CNN Website

The situation in central Bangkok on May 19 was reported on the CNN website like a war movie, which began with an introduction, rising action, climax and falling action. The news begins by describing lives of people living close to the Red shirt anti government protesters protest site. The people interviewed by the CNN reporters talked about their daily lives as if they were in a battle field. The news reported one 64-year-old landlord who owns a five-story building close to the protest site. He and his workers together with their families hid themselves in his house to protect the property. (Trapped in Bangkok’s protest zone: Hunkering down, 2010)

_The men rotate on guard duty throughout the night. Siripanich said he trained the women how to fight back if any of the demonstrators, known as “Red Shirts,” try to break in._

Moreover, identification documents had to be shown to soldiers when entering or leaving the building. Gunfire was heard all the time.

_Siripanich’s crew buys food daily at a market downstairs, but they must show their identification documents to soldiers to get in_
and out of the building....They could hear gunfire “all day, all night”. he said.

Residents in Thailand’s capital took to rooftops on Wednesday, anxiously watched news reports and one family fled their home with precious keepsakes as government troops moved in to evict thousands of anti-government protesters from a downtown district.

They hear gunfire crackling every night and big blasts.

The situation became tense when the military troops began to disperse the Red shirts. This can be seen as a rising action in this news. (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010)

The army surged into Lumpini Park, the area where Red shirt demonstrators had amassed. Armored personnel carriers crushed bamboo and their barricades; the protesters hurled M79 grenades at soldiers. The May sky quickly turned black from thick smoke billowing from landmark buildings set ablaze.

The climax comes when the protest leaders surrendered and declared an end to the protest. (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010)

After hours of intense street battles, seven anti-government protest leaders were taken into custody. Three more turned themselves in Thursday. Red Shirt leaders called off the protest, but it seemed as though many did not heed the call. By Friday, however, three more Red Shirt leaders turned themselves in.

However, instead of moving toward a resolution, the situation turned serious again when a large group of protesters ignored their protest leaders’ plea, that is, to stop protesting and return home. Instead, they went on a rampage of arson. More than ten buildings, including a bank, a police station, a local television station together with Bangkok’s biggest shopping mall were set ablaze. However, the military troops kept on pressure to end a tense standoff, which had troubled the capital of Thailand for weeks. In addition, a number of deaths and injuries were reported. As reported by the CNN, the government considered the Red shirts ‘terrorists’ and their rampage was labeled ‘organized crime’.

Viewing the news as a narrative, the May 19 crackdown news on the CNN portrays the Abhisit government, Thai military force and police collectively as the protagonist around whom the plot of the events revolves.
Due to the bloodshed resulting from the crackdown on the protesters, the Thai media dubbed the event ‘Savage May’. Moreover, the crackdown led to the surrender of the protest leaders and a resurgence of resistance, which ended with deaths, loss and injuries. The news, on the other hand, depicted the red shirted protesters as ‘antagonist’ as shown in the news below.

At the end of each day, the Red shirts have a meeting outside the house, but Chareonsuk doesn’t want to interact with them. (Trapped in Bangkok’s protest zone: Hunkering down, 2010)

‘We are scared a bit that things get out of hand and that all the protesters would come here instead’, he said. (Bangkok residents: This is a ‘mini-civil war’, 2010)

When Normalcy is the Answer

Algirda J. Greimas, a Lithuanian linguist and narratologist, like other structural linguists, tries to look for deep structures of all narratives, or what might be called ‘the underlying grammar of narrative.’ He was influenced by Vladimir Propp’s work, “Morphology of the Folktale”, as mentioned in Structuralism and Semiotics (Hawkes, 2003: 72). Propp’s analyzed a large number of Russian fairy tales and proposed a basic plot component of narratives, which consists of seven ‘spheres of action’. Greimas, referred to in Structuralism and Semiotics (Hawkes, 2003: 70), developed and refined Propp’s analyses. He proposed the ‘actantial model’, or later called, ‘quest model’, that breaks an action down into six actants. Greimas made the distinction between actors and actants. Actors refer to the actual characters that appear in a narrative, while actants are ‘functions’ or ‘roles’ that the characters maintain in the narrative deep structure. An actant can be anything from mankind to the natural world including concrete or abstract notions. The actants that Greimas proposes are Subject versus Object, Helper versus Opponent and Sender versus Receiver.

1. Subject versus Object: this is an axis that generates stories of quest or desire. The Subject searches for a goal or object of desire. The relationship established between the Subject and the Object can be classified as a conjunction or disjunction.

2. Helper versus Opponent: the Helper assists the Subject to achieve what the Subject desires. The Opponent hinders the Subject from fulfilling his/her desire. The conflict between the two actants moves the story forward.

3. Sender versus Receiver: the Sender allows the Subject to obtain the means to deal with the Opponent in order to obtain
successful results. The Receiver benefits from the victory of the Subject. Below is the model representing Greimas’s quest model or actantial model.

![Diagram of Greimas's quest model](image)

**Figure 1** Greimas's quest model (Prachakul, 2009: 252)
Applying Greimas’s quest model or actantial model to the news about the May 19 crackdown in Thailand, the deep structure of this news narrative might be as shown below.

![Diagram of Greimas's quest model](image)

**Figure 2** Greimas’s quest model when applying to the Crackdown May 19 news

The Abhisit government (Subject), the protagonist of this narrative, seeks for the object of desire which is to return people’s lives in Bangkok to normalcy (Object). This axis generates the narrative of the May 19 crackdown. To achieve this goal, the Abhisit government disperses the red shirted protesters and cracks down on them. The crackdown (Helper) assists the government to reach its objective. The red shirted protesters (Opponent), the antagonist, with their resistance, hinder the success of the crackdown. The conflict between these two actants, Helper and Opponent, moves the narrative forward. They fight against each other to achieve their goals. In order to make the crackdown on
the protesters possible, the military troops and police (Sender), the protagonist, have to be with the government and join hands. If the crackdown is successful, the Receiver which includes residents and business owners in Bangkok together with the Abhisit government can live in their normal way of life.

In the deep structure of the news all of the six actants perform their functions or roles to complete the story plot paradigm. The Abhisit government can be both the Subject and the Receiver. Moreover, the Helper and the Sender have a close relationship. The Abhisit government cannot alone take severe action to restrict activities or people opposed to it. A large group of soldiers with specialized training in using weapons to control people behaving violently must be on duty. In other words, the crackdown (Helper) is not possible without the involvement of the military troops and police (Sender). The CNN news report writes: (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010)

_The military operation was the government’s last stand against protests that paralyzed parts of Bangkok for months, Thai officials said._

_But on Wednesday in Bangkok, as bullets rang out, black plumes of smoke rose and soldiers crept forward toward a showdown, it seemed that the time for talking had passed._

In addition, when focusing particularly on the Sender-Receiver axis, it is obvious that though the government has authority to maintain the country’s law and order, it cannot exert its authority to the fullest. It has to deploy the military troops together with the police to successfully disperse a solid mass of protesters. This may also imply in the social hierarchy, which may be the ‘latent meaning,’ that for Thailand the army and its military forces has a higher level of importance than the government (Receiver). It may also imply that the Sender has admirably accomplished its mission. (Prachakul, 2009: 253)

In summary, the quest model or the actantial model reveals the structural roles performed in a certain narrative. Such actant or role fulfills an integral component of the story to make a complete narrative plot paradigm. Without the contribution of each actant, the story might be incomplete. To sum up, an actant is an integral structural element that the narrative revolves upon.

**Violent Means Play a Vital Role Again**

Going further to seek for the ‘heart’ of a narrative, the fundamental signifying role of binary opposition, Greimas, inspired by the Structuralism’s precept, took the binary
opposition to analyze texts in more depth. According to Structuralism ‘everything is what it is by virtue of contrasts or differences within a system. Identity is a matter of relations.’ (Culler, 2006: 3) In his book, ‘Semantique Structurale,’ Greimas writes: ‘We perceive differences, and thanks to that perception, the world ‘takes shape’ in front of us, and for our purposes.’ (cited in Hawkes, 2003: 71)

Adapted from the ‘logical square’ of scholastic philosophy and from Jacobson’s distinction between contradiction and contrariety, the semiotic square was later introduced. Greimas considers it to be the ‘elementary structure of signification.’ Hawkes (2003: 70) explains the semiotic square as follows.

‘The differences we discern between these basic ‘semes’ involve, at an elementary level, four terms, seen as two opposed pairs, which our ‘structuring’ perception requires us to recognize in the following form: A is opposed to B as –A is to –B. In short, the ‘elementary structure’ involves recognition and distinction of two aspects of an entity: its opposite and its negation. We see B as the opposite of A and –B as the opposite of –A, but we also see –A as the negation of A and –B as the negation of B.’

The figure below shows the semiotic square.

The four corners can be taken up by semantic units or semes, which can be concrete or abstract notions. The double headed arrows portray bilateral relationships. Chandler (2006: 119) notes that ‘Greimas refers the relationships between the four positions as: contrariety or opposition (in this figure: A/B

Figure 3 Semiotic square (Chandler, 2006: 119)
and -B/-A; complementarity or implication (A/-B and B/-A); and contradiction (A/-A and B/-B).

To apply the ‘Greimasian’ square to the May 19 crackdown, the ‘hidden’ underlying theme in the news can be highlighted. The semiotic square may look like this.

(1) ‘mini-civil war’

(2) live normal life

(3) Red Shirted Protesters

(4) Abhisit government

non crackdown non riot

riot bloody crackdown

Figure 4 Semiotic square when applying with the May 19 Crackdown news

The initial pair of ‘semes’ or semantic units which are ‘riot’ (A) and ‘crackdown’ (B) are a pair of the binary opposition that forms the basis of a deep-lying grammar of the news, Zone 1. From this deep structure, the superficial surface structure of the May 19 crackdown news is derived and generated.

On May 19 the Abhisit government cracked down on the red shirted protesters. The crackdown turned the situation in Bangkok into a ‘mini civil war’ and turned the capital itself into a ‘war zone’. (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010)

‘We Thai people never experienced this kind of situation before’, said Sirinun Siripanich, the assistant secretary to the Bangkok governor. ‘This is like a mini civil war.’

Bangkok turned into a war zone Wednesday, as Thai military forces cracked down on anti-government protesters, ending a tense standoff that has troubled the capital for weeks.

The news reported that the government was confident that they could bring back peace to the country by cracking down on the protesters. (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010)

Thailand’s prime minister sought to calm public fears with a televised address in which he
expressed confidence that peace would soon be restored. ‘I would like to give moral support to officers who are doing their duties now and would like to reassure you,’ Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva told citizens. ‘And I am confident that we can overcome all the problems and bring the country to a long-lasting peace.’

The red shirted demonstrators, rioting in order to oust Prime Minister Abhisit from office, were also perceived as ‘terrorists’ by the government. (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010)

The government considered the demonstrators to be terrorists, and army Col. Sansern Kaewkamnerd said that growing violence necessitated the use of force. He said soldiers were given the all-clear to fire if they faced a clear threat.

‘The terrorists have created further situations of violence by torching government and business buildings’, Sansern said. ‘It was therefore necessary for the police and military to put further pressure.’

When considering Zone 2, the negation of the first pair of the binary opposition, ‘non crackdown’ (-B) and ‘non riot.’(-A), the situation becomes different. If there had been no riot, there certainly would not have been any crackdown. People in Bangkok could have lived their normal lives. This latter is the situation that the Abhisit government wanted.

The vertical relationship, Zone 3, shows the ‘implication’ or ‘complementarity’ relationship type. The notions ‘riot’ (A) and ‘non crackdown’ (-B) are what the red shirted leaders need. There is, however, an attempt to hold talks between the protesters and the government. Nevertheless, it never happens. (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010)

The violence prompted the United Nation’s top human rights official to implore anti-government protesters and government officials to resume talks.

The CNN reports the failure of the talks by citing a statement issued by the prime minister’s office. (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010)

‘Negotiations failed because core (opposition) leaders are not to be able to make decisions by themselves’, the statement said, alluding to an outside force influencing the protesters. ‘(We) ask core leaders to stop the rally and surrender.’
As things developed contrary to expectations, they canceled the protests and told the demonstrators that they did so in order to prevent the killing of people. (Bangkok residents: This is a ‘mini-civil war’, 2010)

Several Red shirt leaders called off their protests Wednesday afternoon after a large military offensive routed their supporters from a city park where they had amassed.

The leaders could be seen on television addressing a crowd in Lumpini Park, saying they wanted to avoid further bloodshed and wanted to turn themselves in.

The notions taken up in the other vertical relationship, Zone 4, are ‘crackdown’ (B) and ‘non riot’ (-A). The crackdown might be, in the government’s point of view, the sole way to restore peace and bring back normalcy to the capital of Thailand. Nonetheless, it is difficult to avoid the bloody crackdown.

Culler (2006) points out that ‘Structuralists reject causal analysis and any attempt to explain social and cultural phenomena one-by-one, focusing rather on the internal structure of cultural objects and, more important, on the underlying structures that make them possible.’ He further notes that ‘Linguistic analysis, on which structuralism modeled itself, does not try to tell us what sentences mean but seeks to explain how these sequences are constructed and how they can have the meaning they do for speakers of a language.’ (Culler, 2006: 3-4)

From the May 19 crackdown news presented on the CNN website analysis through the semiotic square framework, the Thai political ideology obviously reveals itself. Military forces are always deployed in order to disperse and suppress the protesters. This inevitably leads to bloodshed, which has occurred several times in Thailand. Looking back to the past, there have been major dates in Thai history when people gathered to voice their opinions in opposition to the rulers of the country, such as on *October 14, 1973, **October 6, 1976, ***May 17, 1992 (Black May) (See Notes) and April 2009 as discussed on page 170. The military forces played pivotal roles in these four military operations in order to restore peace. Violent means, which cause casualties and injuries, have been used to stop terrifying circumstances and bloodshed in these four situations, including the one on May 19, 2010. The May 19 crackdown, again, confirms and reproduces this ideology.

Moreover, from the quest model or actantial model framework mentioned earlier, in order that the Abhisit government can ‘bring the country to a long-lasting peace’, ‘the crackdown’ is as ‘Helper’ actant while ‘the military troops and police’ are as
‘Sender’ actant. These two prominent actants assist the Abhisit government to achieve its goal. Both the semiotic square and the quest model support each other and prove that the Thai political ideology discussed above is definitely true. Violent bloody means become the Thai political dominant ideology when dealing with political uprisings.

The CNN interviewed people who lived in the protest zone, all of whom showed that they were scared and wanted to live their normal lives. This may lead to the conclusion that, from its standpoint as a foreign news agency, the CNN likely supports the crackdown by the troops on the protesters. In addition, as all the four news put their emphasis on interviewing people in Bangkok, this shows that it is ordinary people who are always affected and in trouble by the impact of the events, not the people in power.

It seems that the CNN tries to show that it does not take any sides by reporting news from every side, the Abhisit government, people in Bangkok and Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra who, according to the CNN, refused any connection to the UDD. The news quoted what Mr. Thaksin said as follows.

“I never approve nor agree to any use of violence,” he (Mr. Thaksin) said. “I believe in peace. I love my country as much as any member of this government.

I believe in peaceful and non-violent means to end the conflict and reject any use of force.” (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010)

The news further reported that Mr. Thaksin had accused the Thai government of defaming him by saying he had been the mastermind behind the violence in the country’s ongoing political crisis. This helps clarify who was referred to as “an outside force influencing the protesters alludes to the statement of failed talk issued by the prime minister’s office” mentioned in Violence unabated in Thailand news.

The implementation of violent means to bring back normalcy to the country is, again, confirmed and reproduced. From the prime minister’s view, Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva considered the crackdown to be the ‘military forces’ duties’ and ‘growing violence necessitated the use of force’ (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010) Furthermore, according to the news, army Col. Sansern Kaewkamnerd, spokesman for the Army and the Centre for the Resolution of the Emergency Situation (CRES), according to the news, said ‘soldiers were given the all-clear to fire if they faced a clear threat.’ (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010)

Because the protesters created further situations of violence by torching government and business buildings, ‘it was therefore necessary for the police and military to put
on further pressure.’ (Violence unabated in Thailand, 2010)

Conclusion

The news report about the May 19 crackdown is structured around a plot. It has its development from introduction to rising action, climax and resolution. This is obviously a structure of a story, a narrative. The news draws readers in and the actual reported events move on to reveal more about the situation until the events reach their peak and resolve. Consequently, the news is undoubtedly a narrative. The analysis of Nopporn Prachakul on one of Win Lyovarin’s short stories as reviewed earlier also helps confirm this.

The quest model and the semiotic square are used to disclose the deep underlying structure of this news narrative. They uncover both the basic plot paradigm and the ‘hidden meaning’ of values in the text. The articles referred to in the literature review: Pannarai’s and Krissada’s analyses also corroborate this. The deep structure of such narrative is a mechanism that generates what is seen on the surface. The two models help us understand how ideas and meanings are being created, shaped and reinforced. In the news about the May 19 crackdown, the quest model shows the subject, the Abhisit government, seeks for its desire, normalcy. The subject doesn’t struggle to work its way out alone, but with the cooperation of the military troops and police. The meaning created and reinforced here is that the role of military troops is still crucial in Thai society as it has been. To restore peace and order and to bring the country back to normalcy, the military troops together with police always join hands. The crackdown on May 19, 2009 is another example to confirm this. Moreover, the two binary oppositions: ‘riots’ and ‘bloody crackdown’ and their contradiction, ‘non riot’ and ‘non crackdown’ are the ‘heart’ of this news narrative. They are the news’ hidden underlying theme which reinforces Thai political ideology of using violent means to restore peace. This political ideology is, again, confirmed and reproduced by this news.

Notes

‘The “October 14 Uprising”

On October 1973, Thai urban middle class people, led by 13 pro-democracy campaigners and students, had gathered in large numbers to protest against the Thai military regime. They demanded Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, the then prime minister, and his regime successive military governments to step down. The demonstrators also called for a permanent constitution which the Field Marshal abolished in a coup in November 1971. Numerous testimonies reported that the government troops opened fire on
unarmed civilians. The official death toll was 77 and more than 800 people were wounded. Later that day, 14 October, Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, the prime minister, and the other two senior officers, Marshal Praphat Charusathien and Col. Narong Kittikachorn resigned. The ‘three tyrants’ were forced to flee into exile.

**The ‘Massacre of October 1976’**

On 30 September, 1976 at Sanam Luang, thousands of demonstrators, including students from universities, unionists and political activists protested against the return to Thailand of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, who was ousted and was forced to flee the country in the ‘October 14 Uprising’ in 1973. He came back to Thailand in disguise as a Buddhist monk. The protesters soon moved to Thammasat University, the nearby campus. As part of their demonstration, the students organized a mock hanging in order to protest against the murder of the two trade unionists in Nakorn Pathom on September 25. This provoked outrage as one of the student actors showed a certain resemblance to a member of a royal family. In response to the alleged mock hanging of the royal family’s member, military troops, police, right-wing activists and paramilitary groups like the Village Scouts, the Border Patrol Police, etc., stormed and began to fire into the campus using military weapons. Approximately 1700 students were arrested for lese majeste. It was officially reported that 46 people were dead and 167 wounded.

***Black May 1992***

In March 1992, a general election was held and General Suchinda Krapayoon, a coup d’état leader who had staged a coup on February 1991 was appointed prime minister. General Suchinda, who did not come to power through an election, had earlier said that he would support a constitutional amendment making individuals who had not been elected to Parliament ineligible for the premiership. His being prime minister, which was contrary to what he had earlier said brought hundreds of thousands of people out in a demonstration in central Bangkok to demand his resignation. Military troops were moved in to suppress the demonstration and dispersed the protesters. This led to riots and massacre in which hundreds of people died and were injured. Because of King Bhumiphol’s intervention, General Suchinda resigned and the protesters dispersed.

**References**


Bangkok Post: 1.


extrafile=A12169B9-BODO-B086-B67
FBF2EEB609D89.html

bookrags.com/history/october-6-
crisisthailand-ema-04/

ON THIS DAY 14 October. [Online]. 2012,
co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/
October/14/newsid__2534000/2534347.
stm

Osathaphiwat, Pannarai. 1998. “‘On a River at Night’ What Goes Around Comes
Around.” Features Magazine. 14, 160:
134-136. (in Thai).

พรรณราย โอสถภิวัฒน์. 2541. “‘บนห้องน้ำเมื่อยาข่มคำ’ คำเด็ด คำน่าเก็บไว้?” สารคดี. 14,

People’s Alliance of Democracy. [Online].
politicalbase.in.th (in Thai).

พันธมิตรประชาชนเพื่อประชาธิปไตย. [ออนไลน์]
25 กันยายน 2554. เข้าถึงจาก: http://
politicalbase.in.th

Political__colour

Lament of Scourge.” Features Magazine.

นพพร ประชาภูลส. 2541. “ข่าวสารใน อาเพศ

Prachakul, Nopporrn. 2009. York Ak Sorn
Yon Kwam Kid Volume 2: Social
Studies Issues. Bangkok: Read and
Vi Pa Sa Publishing Houses. (in Thai).

นพพร ประชาภูลส. 2552. ยกถ้วยธง ย้อนความคิด
เล่ม 2 ว่าด้วย สังคมศาสตร์ กรุงเทพมหานคร.
อ่านและวิเคราะห์.

6 October 1976 Massacre. [Online]. 2012,
February 27. Available: http://
asiancorrespondent.com/41185/
demystifying-thailand-via-6 October-
1976-massacre/

siamfreedomfight.blockspot.com/2010/
story-of-udd-NUDD.html. (in Thai).

จุดเริ่มต้นของประ-มวล. (Story of UDD-NUDD).
[ออนไลน์]. 25 กันยายน 2554. เข้าถึงจาก :
http://siamfreedomfight.blockspot.com/
2010/story-of-udd-NUDD.html

Suveeranondha, Pracha. 1997. Lae Nua Thua

ประชา สุริยวณท์. 2540. แล้วเนื้อเลือดหนัง.
กรุงเทพมหานคร. มติชน.

Thai Revolutions. [Online]. 2012, February
com/art__hist.htm

Thailand to Prosecute Protest Leaders.
cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/05/20/
thailand.protests/index.html?hpt=T1


Miss Narumol Chantrasupawong received her Master of Arts in Linguistics from Chulalongkorn University. She is currently working at the Department of Business English, School of Humanities, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce. Her main interests are in language and language teaching.