

[Linguistics] REGIME CHANGES

From emails sent last year, purportedly to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, by Lamis Omar, a Ph.D. student working as his translator. The emails were among hundreds recovered by WikiLeaks and released in July. This passage adapted from Harpers Magazine, September 2012.

[1] “It is my land by all means: legal, political, and national. Sooner or later, it has to go back.”

The use of the phrasal verb “to go back” literally means “to return,” but its use depends on the subject of the sentence, the object, and the verb used. Look at the following examples. “Jews should go back to their country of origin.” “The Palestinians have to go back to their occupied land.” “Our land should come back to us.”

[2] “If I am free with you, how can I not be free with the Syrians?” This expression does not exist in the English lexicon.

There is a common mistake in the use of the definite article “the” with uncountable nouns such as “war,” “peace,” “love,” “joy,” “poetry,” “friendship,” etc. We modify uncountable nouns only if we are talking about a “defined” case of the general noun. Example: “I believe in the democracy and the freedom.” The correct use is “I believe in democracy and freedom” or “I believe in the democracy that gives justice for all and the freedom that liberates the minds of the people.”

[3] “They have to learn that only peace can protect their country” (for Israelis).

Is it really their country? Wouldn't it be clearer if you said, “They have to learn that only peace can protect their security”?

[4] “Chirac kidnapped the association agreement.”

The word “kidnap” is not very common in contexts other than “kidnapping people.” However, I have come across the word “hijack” in examples like, “We should learn from our recent history and be more vigilant so that some people do not hijack the situation and sow the seeds of anarchy.”