

Review: Use of the term “exclusive” in describing CBC news reports

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**REVIEW**

On its February 24 Here & Now program, CBC Newfoundland and Labrador presented an “exclusive” report about a Newfoundlander who had fled turbulent Libya after working as a pilot for about three months for Afriqiyah, one of Libya’s national airlines. Rod Chubbs said he found it difficult to escape Libya during civil unrest and said the Canadian government wasn’t doing all it should to help people leave.

Its report was carried in two different segments of the 90-minute newscast, [online](#) and on CBC Radio regionally and nationally.

The complainant, Lionel West, objected to the use of the term “exclusive” to describe the content. He said he heard the Here & Now report earlier on its Early Edition half-hour and saw it had been posted online even sooner.

He asserted that the use of the term “exclusive” was excessive. Since CBC differentiates between Early Edition and Here & Now, he said, the story should have been deemed exclusive to only one of them and not both.

“It would have been more accurate for Here & Now to say ‘CBC has an exclusive story. . .,’” he wrote. “It may only be words, but CBC and Here & Now harms itself and its credibility, when using language that clearly is creating an impression that does not exist.”

Neither [CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices](#) nor CBC’s in-house guide on language use directly provide any reference point against which to evaluate performance. The policies comprise techniques and approaches striving for high standards, integrity and trustworthy news and information.

On the use of language, the standards and practices policy states: *“Good usage and accuracy are essential to high quality journalism. Our language should be simple, clear and concrete.”*

## CONCLUSION

The era of abundant media features abundant use of “exclusive,” a journalistic term to describe information possessed solely by a news provider.

Given that today there are often many sources of the same information, it is understandable that news organizations will cite exclusivity on content they have to themselves in order to build a reputation for independence, distinction and aggressive researching and reporting in their communities. Some believe that leads to a larger or more loyal audience that feels it necessary to consume newscasts where such content can be expected regularly.

There might be times when the usage is excessively applied, but in my judgment, this wasn't one of them.

The program production unit for the regional newscast learned of the story first and carried it across as many of its platforms as soon as it could. It was legitimate to pronounce the content as “exclusive” because the program unit and all its applications alone possessed the story.

Traditionally, it is in keeping with journalistic practices for different segments of a newscast to call the story “exclusive.” Even though the segments are often titled differently — as they are in this instance — they are produced by the same unit overall with many of the journalists working across different segments. Thus, it is not any stretch to say that each segment shares the exclusivity of the content.

Were the programs distinct — say, The Fifth Estate and The National — one might expect them to note that it was a CBC News exclusive and to perhaps credit the origin of the reporting. But in this instance, it was fair to claim exclusivity on both Early Edition and Here & Now, on radio and online.

There was no violation of CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices.

Kirk LaPointe  
CBC Ombudsman