

# SOAS LANGUAGE CENTRE RESOURCES ROOM

## *LEARNERS' VOICES* Satellite TV. What should I watch?

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*The following comments refer to Thai satellite TV programmes, but the same ideas may also apply to TV programmes in other languages.*

**Tim Higginson, upper-intermediate learner of Thai, March 2007**

From a student perspective, I find the Thai soaps by far the most useful language learning tool. The news and chat shows I find less useful. The adverts hold an intermediate position. Let me explain...

► The **TV news** essentially falls into two situations:

(1) *We see the newsreader reading the news.* In situation (1) it is easier to work out what words are being said, as we can use our visual sense to lip-read and our aural sense to hear it. However, if the vocabulary is unfamiliar to us, as it often is in a news situation, it can be almost impossible to work out the meaning of what is being said.

(2) *We see film images of the news being reported on, without seeing the newsreader reading it.* This is in many ways the reverse of situation (1), in that visual representation of the news in film images enables us to see directly what topic is being discussed. However, as against this, we can no longer make use of the lip-reading facility, so it often becomes difficult to work out what Thai words are being said.

► **Chat shows** really suffer from the same drawbacks as situation (1) above for the news, in that we generally see some people chatting with each other in a studio, and so can use both our visual sense to lip-read and aural to hear. However, in the absence of explanatory images one can quickly become lost as to the situations being discussed and therefore the meaning. It can be a very frustrating experience indeed to watch a chat show under these conditions!

► **Adverts** always contain visual imagery to explain the subject matter. Sometimes they also show the people speaking the words we are hearing as well. When they do this, we have the best of both worlds, as it were, in that we have the visual clues both from the film images being shown and from lip-reading, at the same time being able to use our aural sense to hear what is being said. Adverts where there is only a voiceover, without the speaker appearing, fall into much the same category as situation (2) discussed above in the context of news. As such, they are less useful.

► **Thai soaps** have the benefits of the visual imagery of the drama itself, the facility to lip-read what the characters are saying and, of course, we can hear what is being said too. There are further benefits. First, there is the musical soundtrack, which frequently directs us to the emotion we should be feeling, which is a further pointer to the meaning. There is also the body language of the characters, providing yet another pointer. By definition, soaps are dramatic. Frequently, in fact, they can be rather overacted (this is one of the many appeals of the form, in my opinion!). There is almost always at least one character who is much larger than life, who speaks with exaggerated intonation, and uses exaggerated language. It is sometimes useful to hear and see Thai spoken in an exaggerated way, as it brings out key points which we might otherwise miss in Thai being spoken "normally".

No doubt one should exercise some discrimination in choosing which soaps and, indeed, which scenes from those soaps, could most beneficially be used as a learning aid. This sort of selection would rely on the teacher's knowledge and expertise, rather than the student's. However, I think there is certainly a lot of potential in the idea of using carefully selected scenes from certain Thai soaps as a teaching/learning aid. **Thai films**, too, could be used in much the same way.

This is just the personal opinion of one student - me!

► *UQCU satellite TV and radio channels are listed here: [iptv.soas.ac.uk](http://iptv.soas.ac.uk)*