

SOAS LANGUAGE CENTRE RESOURCES ROOM

Watching Japanese TV News Videos

Last updated: 06 June 07

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What is Japanese TV News like?

Watching Japanese TV News has much in common with reading a Japanese newspaper and with listening to Japanese radio news; in some ways it is a combination of the two. Obviously the announcer reads most of the news out loud, so you need listening skills. And television also provides images to help us deduce meaning from context. But why liken TV News with reading a newspaper? This is because, on Japanese TV news, a vast amount of written information is provided on screen. On NHK news almost all of the news is printed at the bottom of the screen so you can see the written version as it is read out. This may appear off-putting to learners who find written Japanese difficult, but in time it proves to be enormously helpful. So we can use Japanese TV news broadcasts to work on listening and reading skills, as well as learning about current issues in Japan.

Language

Speed of delivery varies but newsreaders speak clearly and pronounce each syllable distinctly, so that by repeating the video, it should be possible to pick up the sounds. Interviewees, politicians and other spokespeople are of course another matter. They may use dialect, speak very fast, or use difficult formal language. In these cases it can be helpful to stop the tape and read the text provided. Very often an entire interview is subtitled.

It is worth noting that the TV news often uses relatively long sentences, and is especially heavy in *kanji*-based vocabulary. Rare or overly complex grammar does not tend to occur, but students need a good knowledge of standard Japanese grammar to an upper intermediate or advanced level to follow news programs. Perhaps more significant is the quantity and breadth of vocabulary which comes up. Many students have studied everyday conversation but have limited vocabulary in areas like business, politics and so on, so this can prove overwhelming. Beginners and lower-intermediate students may be better served by watching TV dramas or documentary programs first, before tackling the news. However, because news broadcasts are intended to be understood by the broadest possible cross-section of Japanese adults they are an excellent source of language – all the constructions and phrases are very useful.

Contents

News stories typically carry over for several days, and very little explanation is given when an ongoing story is pursued. So do not be dismayed when you switch on the TV news or watch a video for the first time and cannot understand what is going on; chances are that many of the items have come up in previous days and weeks so knowledge of the background is assumed. An item may be difficult even for a native speaker to put in context if watched out of the blue. If you can, make use of archived recordings to trace a story back. Typical categories in NHK news bulletins are: politics, economics, society, international news, regional news and sport. Not even native speakers will be familiar with all topics; it is best to focus on a small area for study purposes, so you can make progress without getting overwhelmed.

The satellite TV and radio channels which we carry at SOAS are listed here: iptv.soas.ac.uk