

Review of “Basic Thai in the Context of Thai Studies for Foreigners”

Title	แบบเรียนภาษาไทยเบื้องต้นในบริบทไทยศึกษาสำหรับชาวต่างชาติ (Basic Thai in the Context of Thai Studies for Foreigners)
Authors	Somphong Wittayasakpan, Rangrong Nilpraphatsorn, Yaowalak Krasaesind and Amphorn Kaewsuwan
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With the increasing popularity of the Thai language, foreigners wanting to learn the Thai language often encounter difficulties in finding a standardized basic Thai language book. Previously, most basic Thai language books are structured based on a self-study, business-oriented topical approach which often leads one to ask which is the most effective book or method of learning the Thai language.

This book, written and compiled by Sompong Wittayasakpan, Rangrong Nilpraphatsorn, Yaowalak Krasaesind and Amphorn Kaewsuwan was an initiative by Thailand's Ministry of University Affairs to have a standardized book for the teaching of basic Thai to foreigners. The Ministry coordinated with other relevant Thai language agencies to set up a committee headed by Wittayasakpan from Chiang Mai University, Thailand. Wittayasakpan and his committee, which comprises many respected members of the Thai language teaching fraternity, have vast experience in teaching Thai language. This book is the product of the meetings by Wittayasakpan and his committee on their collective experiences in teaching Thai language to foreigners and duly reflects the depth of research and experience of the respective members involved in this book.

As mentioned in the preface, this book is recommended to be used as an outline or guide for the individual learner of basic Thai language. The book can also be used by the Thai language teacher as a basic Thai language course. A detailed curriculum can be developed from the book, depending on different considerations, e.g. class size, learning hours, specific interests, students' learning objectives, and even the background of the students.

The book is divided into two parts: speaking and writing. The speaking section of the book is structured based on topics. The speaking section aids the learner because the content is organised in a progressive and logical manner from the first lesson on self-introduction to 24th lesson (second from last) on giving opinions on others, which is more advanced, particularly if the learner is a beginner in the Thai language. In using the book, the teacher can use as many or as few sentence structures or grammar depending on the specific requirements for the students. Similarly, the individual learner can adopt a pace of learning which he or she can manage.

In the speaking section, most chapters start with the introduction of vocabulary followed by a dialogue (which can be considered lengthy by a beginner's standard). For some chapters, grammar instead of dialogue is introduced after the vocabulary. One significant utility of this book, in my opinion, is that the contents of the dialogue are organized to allow the teacher to choose a shorter dialogue instead of the entire dialogue, based on the students' abilities and learning objectives. In addition, specific portions of the dialogue can also be used as a closed book language drill for students. In this way, the teacher or individual learner can have more than one dialogue for practice within a specific chapter.

As regards the grammar in each chapter, the teacher can also introduce it to help students understand it before starting the dialogue section. There is also a reading and listening comprehension section at the end of the chapter which reviews the key learning points for each chapter. Overall, one will appreciate the logical, progressive yet flexible manner in which the contents of the book are organized. This allows the teacher to match the pace of instruction to the respective learning styles of the class.

The gradual and logical flow of the book extends to the learning and the use of grammar and vocabulary in speaking. As an example, Chapter 15, "Go Shopping," includes the classifiers for different things as well as ordering and purchasing with specific requests. Though both topics are introduced from Chapter 5 onwards, the level of sophistication in the use of grammar and vocabulary taught in Chapter 15 has actually increased. Therefore, the student will have to be more diligent in understanding and using the grammar in a single chapter. As the student's Thai language proficiency increases, the later chapters (from Chapters 12 to 25) aptly introduce more sophisticated use of grammar and vocabulary. This allows the learner to pick up the variations and nuances in the use of grammar and vocabulary; and in the process, this deepens the students' knowledge and creativity in the use of the Thai language. To help students learn how to speak, the book includes a compact disc for listening. The CD will be beneficial for both students and the self-study individual to revise at their own time, especially for accurate pronunciation.

The contents of the book are appropriate for foreigners to understand and appreciate basic Thai language. The learning extends beyond just the Thai language to an appreciation of all things Thai, especially the popular Thai cuisine. Lessons include Thai fruits, indigenous Thai food, Thai drinks and the taste of Thai food in different chapters. As an example, in Chapter 11, "Eating indigenous Thai food," specific details about the type and taste of the food are taught. The chapter goes into detail on how to order the Thai papaya salad of your choice (there are two types) and how spicy you would like the salad to be. The chapter, which also includes the northern and southern cuisine of Thailand, will allow the native Thai teacher to showcase and introduce other aspects of Thai culture to the students.

Part Two of the book focuses on reading and writing. There are ten chapters. The book also has two glossaries: one arranged in Thai alphabetical order and the other arranged according to categories of words. In the writing section, the Thai alphabets are introduced with the rules and their exceptions for students to memorize. The learner will need discipline to memorize all the alphabets at once because the writing section is structured tightly. As in the speaking section, the teacher can flexibly structure the curriculum according to the class requirements. However, the teacher will need to prepare extra materials for writing practice because the writing exercises in the book are short and compact.

As for reading, the use of the Thai passages for reading practice from chapter 5 onwards is somewhat fast because reading practice in earlier chapters used only short sentences. Foreign students learn to read Thai using phonetic symbols and they would need a period of transition from reading using phonetic symbol to Thai before they become more proficient in reading Thai. The teacher has to design an effective transition between reading in phonetic symbol to reading in Thai as part of the curriculum. However, one advantage in the curriculum design for reading and writing is that the contents are similar to the speaking section. The learner's familiarity in the topic will facilitate his reading and writing practice.

Overall, the book is a wonderful resource for teaching and learning Thai language. It is meticulously researched and thoughtfully structured to allow the teacher to be flexible and yet creative in developing materials for interactive learning, and the book has more than achieved the purpose of being a standardized book for learning basic Thai language.