

Tips on how to make the most of TV news

If you are listening to live TV, it is very difficult to understand every single word, but with the help of the picture, the vocabulary and structures you know, words appearing on the screen and your background knowledge of current affairs you should be able to grasp the main information.

Before you start: try to identify your needs for watching the news. Are you watching because:

You were told to do so, in order to improve your language skills.

If so, you then have to be aware of the following points: Listening to the news in a foreign language is not only a language exercise, it is an exercise which requires quite a lot of background cultural knowledge. If you don't read the newspaper in your own language, and if you're not familiar with current affairs, you are likely to find it very hard.

You are genuinely interested in current affairs and informed about current events (home and international news). In that case, you are likely to be able to focus more on language as the background knowledge will be familiar to you. Consequently, when you aim to develop your language skills and vocabulary through watching the news, select items you are familiar with (or have heard about) in English.

Secondly, once you have identified your needs, try to establish your level of understanding. If you find live news on TV too difficult to follow, start by using our recorded version that you'll find in the LMRC.

Thirdly, make sure that you always give yourself something to do while you're watching/ listening, as it will help your understanding.

Some suggested activities

Before listening

Make a list of recent items of news you have heard or seen on the British radio or TV, or even in newspapers. Write down everything you can remember about each item. You can then do some vocabulary work, by looking in the dictionary for words that are likely to come up in the foreign version of the news.

While listening

The first time you listen, you could simply check which of the items you wrote down are on the foreign news. Then, select the two or three items you are most interested in and try to understand them in more detail. Remember that news broadcasts are on repeatedly during the day and very rarely change. Write down any word or structure you hear but do not fully understand, regardless of the correct spelling. Then, try to reconstruct the meaning of the word or sentence by searching in a dictionary or talking to another language student or talking to a tutor.

After listening

Try to do either a written or an oral report of what you have heard. If you decide to do it orally, do it for another person who understands the language or do it on tape in the language lab. It will give you the opportunity to practise your speaking skills and re-use the vocabulary you have just learnt. If you do it in writing, try to have it checked by someone else and keep it safe as it can be re-used for a translation exercise a bit later on.

Remember!

Working on a news broadcast or any other piece of video/audio material does not have to be an individual or lonely task. If you prefer, you can decide to do it with a partner. This will give you a greater choice of activities and make the learning more fun.

If you have any further ideas on how to exploit the news for language learning, or if you would like to discuss a specific problem you have, contact Valerie Leick, Languages for All, v.leick@bham.ac.uk (<mailto:v.leick@bham.ac.uk>)