# Review One

# A Beginning Thai Language Coursebook set

*by*

## Yuphaphann Hoonchamlong
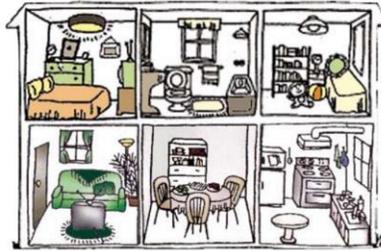
## Descriptive Summary

*A Beginning Thai Language Coursebook set* by Dr. Yuphaphann Hoonchamlong comprises two course books. In this review I discuss the first one, *Thai Language and Culture for Beginners* Book 1, distributed by the University of Hawai'i at Manoa in 2007. The course book is now available as a print-on-demand edition with audio and video materials. These are freely downloadable courtesy of the University of Hawai'i's National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC). A mobile friendly, Interactive E-Book companion is available for Book 2 and in progress for Book 1. The author recommends that learners concomitantly study the Thai writing system using a multimedia-enhanced version of J. Marvin Brown's *AUA Language Center Thai Course: Reading and Writing*, which will be made available next year as Interactive E-Tutorials.

Dr. Hoonchamlong's textbook provides a foundation in conversational Standard Thai for beginners, with a focus on developing listening and speaking skills. It is for use in Thai as a Foreign Language classes in U.S. universities. The book takes beginning learners of Thai up to a Novice-High or an Intermediate-Low level of proficiency as defined by criteria adapted from the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The vocabulary comprises just under 1,000 lexical items (Hartmann, 2008). The book's content is presented in three formats: Thai script, transliterated, and translated into English.

The author described that the objectives are to build communicative and cultural competence by teaching a sequence of language skills culminating in the learner's ability to get through day-to-day interactions using Thai (p. iii). The book has five units with four lessons each; each unit incorporates grammar, cultural knowledge, and functional language topics that fit together thematically. Unit 1 prepares students for some very simple interactions: basic courtesy expressions and Thai politeness particles, numbers 1-20, self-introductions, and finally nationality and language. Unit 2 increases students' conversational repertoire: providing and obtaining personal descriptions; kinship and marital status; and professions. Unit 3 is thematically bound by food: learning about Thai currency and simple transactions; using numeric classifiers; expressing likes and dislikes; ordering food; and finally learning about Thai food and eating etiquette. Unit 4 covers the notoriously tricky Thai system of telling time, making and negotiating appointments, as well as days of the week, the months, the seasons, the weather, and temperature. Unit 5 covers modes of transportation, the provinces and regions of Thailand, giving and receiving directions around town, and household objects and their locations within a room.

Dialogs and monologs are the primary medium for delivering content. Most lessons commence with a list of vocabulary and grammatical structures or both, which correspond to a dialog or monolog with accompanying video clips. Figure 1 contains an example of one such monolog and showcases the textbook's three-script presentation format.

| บ้าน หลัง นี้ มี 2 ชั้น ชั้นบน มี ห้องนอน 2 ห้อง และ ห้องน้ำ 1 ห้อง ชั้นล่าง มี ห้องนั่งเล่น ห้องกินข้าว และ ห้องครัว | bâan lǎŋ níi mii sɔ̌ɔŋ chán. chán bon mii hɔ̂ŋ-nɔɔn sɔ̌ɔŋ hɔ̂ŋ lɛ́ hɔ̂ŋ-náam nɨ̀ŋ hɔ̂ŋ. chán lâaŋ mii hɔ̂ŋ nâŋ-lên hɔ̂ŋ-kin-khâaw lɛ́ hɔ̂ŋ khrua. | • This house has two stories. On the upper floor, there are 2 bed-rooms and a bathroom. The lower floor has a living room, a dining room and a kitchen. |

*Figure 1:* Lesson 5.4, p. 224

Each unit also features *structure notes*, *language notes*, and *culture notes*. The structure notes provide detailed, clear, concise, and accurate explanations of grammatical concepts and sentence structures. The language notes elucidate Thai lexical items that are not otherwise easily defined. The cultural notes impart knowledge about life in Thailand using novel vocabulary.

## Evaluative Summary

Of this textbook's many strengths, an outstanding feature is the functionally relevant and well-sequenced content, which provides beginning learners of Thai with a solid foundation for living in or visiting Thailand. The sequencing of the content reflects the importance of meeting and befriending speakers of Thai. Upon first meeting, you introduce yourself and exchange personal information (Unit 1+2), after which, you might arrange to meet up a second time, perhaps for a meal (Unit 3+4). Traveling around Thailand (Unit 5) is both a common topic of conversation and a solo activity that learners are likely to engage in while in Thailand. Important elements of Thai

pragmatics, which create a positive perception of the language user, such as politeness particles, fictive kinship titles, and eating etiquette, receive ample attention. Finally, the textbook contains abundant cultural tidbits including popular Thai figures, holidays, word origins, and proverbs. This knowledge promotes cultural and historical understanding, and having such knowledge endears locals to language learners, which gives the learners a leg up in their language acquisition.

There are two possible shortcomings that I observe in the textbook, which can in fact provide opportunities for greater learner autonomy. The first shortcoming is the textbook's transliteration system. Although it provides scaffolding for learners, the effort required to pronounce the transliteration system correctly might be better spent learning the Thai script. Thai teachers will have to decide for themselves (whether they will use the transliterations fully or not). Thai script is an almost perfect phonetical representation of Thai pronunciation *including tone*; thus, directly using the Thai script may help students better comprehend the difficult aspects of spoken Thai such as vowel duration and tone. Teachers who wish to emphasize literacy should avail themselves of other, complimentary online resources such as [www.thai-language.com](www.thai-language.com), which contains information that students may use to learn the script.  In addition to aiding pronunciation, acquisition of the Thai script will eventually enable students to utilize written materials. Another issue is the vocabulary load: It might overwhelm beginners (Hartmann, 2008), and there is no teacher's guide indicating how to teach the vocabulary in the textbook. This presents an opportunity for teachers to be creative, and for students to take control of their vocabulary learning using a vocabulary journal (Katz, 2014) or vocabulary learning software available online (Godwin-Jones, 2010). Such approaches to vocabulary acquisition promote learner autonomy.

The author has managed to compile wide-ranging linguistic information about Thai and examples of Thai language use into one convenient resource. Generous use of English in this textbook means that students can learn *about* Thai without an instructor to guide

them. However, teachers could encourage implicit language learning by implementing a task-based language teaching (tblt) approach. This would require supplementing *Thai Language and Culture for Beginners* with tasks that incorporate meaningful language, requiring learners to mobilize language to achieve an outcome (Ellis, 2009). Because the textbook contains a wealth of easily accessible information, a teacher could easily implement a flipped classroom approach, where "vocabulary and grammar are presented for the first time before class [and] class time is primarily dedicated to providing students with opportunities to produce output and interact with one another" (Spino & Trego, 2015, p. 3).

Ellis (2009) argued that in addition to output prompting tasks, input providing tasks are necessary for language learning (as cited by Erlam, 2016), and must precede output prompting tasks at the elementary or beginning level of proficiency. Correspondingly, *Thai Language and Culture for Beginners* has audio and visual materials (dialogs and sound-clips of vocabulary words) that teachers can employ in the creation of input providing tasks. To create output prompting tasks, teachers may want to utilize any number of the communicative activities (Nation & Newton, 2008) provided; examples are included in Table 1. The example in Figure 2, taken from the unfinished companion workbook, exemplifies a task with input providing elements that teachers can replicate or modify.

*Table 1:* Output Prompting Tasks

| 1.1 Basic Courtesy Expressions | Lesson 2.3 – Kinship Terms | Lesson 4.1 – Time of Day | Lesson 3.3 – Thai Food |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Role Playing task* Students create and act out a light-hearted dialog where courtesy | *Information Sharing task* Students work to create a family tree by interviewing | *Information Sharing task* Students ask a partner the time of an event to | *Opinion Sharing task* Students read a menu in Thai and |

| expressions are not properly employed | individual family members | complete a time table. | agree on what to order. |

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**V. Listening Task**

🎧 ✍ Listen to Faang's self introduction and fill in the file card below.

1. Fill in the profile card.

| ฟาง | Year of Birth |
| | Birthplace |
| | Height |
| | Weight |
| | Occupation |

*Figure 2:* Listening Task, Lesson 2.1, Companion Workbook

In summary, this textbook represents the very best material available for the instruction of Thai. Its content is wide-ranging and well-sequenced, and its applicability to tblt has been demonstrated in this review. While the language-teaching community eagerly awaits further supplementary materials, instructors are called upon to employ their ingenuity and their skill as they continue to teach Thai with this foundational textbook.

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