

Suprasegmentals: Tone and Length

-tone

Mandarin (4 tones)

high level	<i>tāng</i> 湯 ‘soup’
high rising	<i>táng</i> 糖 ‘sugar’
low dipping	<i>tǎng</i> 躺 ‘lie down’
falling	<i>tàng</i> 燙 ‘hot’

Cantonese (6 tones)

high level	si55 詩 ‘poem’
mid level	si33 試 ‘try’
low level	si22 事 ‘matter, thing’
low falling	si21 時 ‘time’
high rising	si35 使 ‘cause’
low rising	si13 市 ‘city, market’

Vietnamese (6 tones in Hanoi)

sắc (high rising, tense)	<i>bá</i> ‘cling’
ngã (high rising, creaky)	<i>bã</i> ‘waste’
ngang (mid level)	<i>ba</i> ‘three’
huyền (low falling, breathy)	<i>bà</i> ‘grandma’
hỏi (low rising, tense)	<i>bả</i> ‘she’
nặng (low falling, creaky)	<i>bạ</i> ‘record’; ‘at random’

(In South Vietnam, ngã and hỏi are not distinct.)

LENGTH

cab	cap	[k ^h æ:b]	[k ^h æp]
ride	right	[ɹaɪ:d]	[ɹaɪt]
hid	hit	[hɪ:d]	[hɪt]
feed	feet	[fi:d]	[fit]

In English, it is impossible to find two words that are different **ONLY** by virtue of vowel length. But in Japanese, many words are distinguished this way.

Vowels

ojisan ‘uncle’ おじさん

ojiisan ‘grandfather’ おじいさん (IPA [i] vs. [i:])

tsuki ‘moon’ 月

tsuuki ‘airflow’ 通気 (IPA [ɯ] vs. [ɯ:])

koke ‘moss’ 苔

kokee ‘solid’ 固形 (IPA [e] vs [e:])

Consonants

kita ‘north’ 北

kitta ‘cut’ (past tense) 切った (IPA [t] vs. [t:])

shiku ‘to lay out’ 敷く

shikku ‘chic’ シック (IPA [k] vs. [k:])

kanen ‘flammable’ 可燃

kannen ‘notion’ 観念 (IPA [n] vs. [n:])