

Re: uh?

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- *From:* Bart Mathias <[mathias@xxxxxxxxxx](mailto:mathias@xxxxxxxxxx)>
  - *Date:* Sat, 05 Nov 2005 02:28:48 GMT
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The Wanderer wrote:

Bart Mathias wrote:

[...]  
It depends how you define "sound." If you mean it as what distinguishes one word from another, then "standard" Japanese has exactly five vowels. (Some dialects might have fewer; at least one I know has more.)

I would be *\*very\** interested, on at least an academic level, to learn more about that. (My inner etymologist sat up and took notice at the very mention of the idea that there might be variations on such a basic level.)

Zhen Lin's post (which I'm about to respond to) is no doubt a good start.

As to the definition of "sound", I think I can safely borrow one of the definitions I've derived from considering the tree-in-a-forest question: "something a person would recognize as being a sound", or in this case, "something a person would recognize as being a distinct sound". If the difference can be heard - not simply "detected" as with a 'sound spectrograph' (and I *\*know\** there's a technical term for that) - then I'd probably classify the sounds as being different.

But what we can hear distinctly as far as speech sounds go varies according to what language(s) we speak.

For example, in spite of 10 months of intensive Korean at Army Language School, I cannot distinguish with full confidence between a Korean aspirate and a "non-aspirate" in utterance initial position (i.e., after any pause), where non-aspirates happen to be aspirated. There is a clear difference to Korean ears; I doubt if a Korean would understand another Korean who deliberately mixed up the words for "blood" (phi) and "rain" (pi). Where I would probably understand "phi-ga onda" as "It's raining," confusing it with the ordinary sentence "pi-ga onda," a native would s

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