

Re: uh?

Re: uh?

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang.japan/2005-11/msg00128.html>

- *From:* The Wanderer <inverseparadox@xxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Sat, 05 Nov 2005 00:21:11 -0500
-

Bart Mathias wrote:

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.

A little bit more complex than I can easily avoid getting bogged down in, but yes, a good place to start I think. It (or, rather, your response which quotes the entire thing and adds more information) has gone into my too-extensive collection of notes.

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.

Re: uh?

Re: uh?

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

I had given that possibility some thought, and I *think* it can be resolved under the same rule I'd have used if someone raised a point along the lines of "well, I can't hear the difference between X and Y, and I'm a person" - that being, if there is *any* person who can consistently recognize the two candidates as distinct sounds, then classify them that way. This is of course not practical for any formal, comprehensive system, since while the number of sounds which would then need to be classified is not infinite it *is* inherently indefinite, but for the more limited cases any given person (including either of us) is likely to work with it may serve well enough.

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 surely want to know, "What do you mean, 'blood is coming'?"

Yeah... this reminds me of my utter lack of comprehension of even the concept referred to in some of the reading I've done (none of it formal, and very little of it non-fiction) about Chinese and similar languages, in which the *intonation* is critical to the meaning; the idea is not nonsense, but it seems monumentally unwieldy (especially given how often intonation can vary owing to things like emotion).

Closer to home, a lot of English speakers *hear* "Mary," "merry," and "marry" as homonyms, even in the speech of someone who distinguishes them distinctly. "Worse" yet, William Labov claimed he investigated the speech of New Yorkers who could not distinguish "sauce" and "source" with sound spectrograms, and found that they *did* distinguish them.

And closer to (my) home still, most of the members of my family can tell with at least about two-thirds accuracy which browser is being referred to when someone mentions "links" or "lynx". I've done it myself, and I have no idea *how* I do it (either in hearing or in speaking the word), but it's happened on multiple occasions.

So, yeah, I do know the general principle, I just wasn't sure how far it applied.

Re: uh?

Re: uh?

Incidentally, since we seem to be drifting offtopic and I haven't been reading this group quite long enough to get a grasp of it yet: how much tolerance of limited offtopic discussion is there, here? I know of some newsgroups where it runs far beyond "limited" and no one complains, some where it's common but not encouraged, some where it's rarely considered acceptable, and some where it's absolute anathema; I haven't seen anything I'd readily recognize as noticeably offtopic here in the last few months, so I don't have a good barometer measurement yet.

--

The Wanderer

Warning: Simply because I argue an issue does not mean I agree with any side of it.

Secrecy is the beginning of tyranny.

.

Re: uh?