

Length and Accent in Japanese

In Japanese, length can be contrastive for both consonants and vowels, giving the following patterns:

	In isolation	In carrier phrase	Open WAV file
kite “komme”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ki:te “höre”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
kitte “Briefmarke”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
kitte “schneide”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note that the last two words are distinguished by their accent pattern. Japanese is usually referred to as a “pitch accent” language, so accented syllables are determined by the pitch pattern rather than by increased length or intensity.

Another vowel length example

Here is a three-way accent contrast (from Illustrations of the IPA)

- | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> “bridge” | <input type="checkbox"/> “chopsticks” | <input type="checkbox"/> “end” |
| <input type="checkbox"/> “paint a bridge” | <input type="checkbox"/> “paint chopsticks” | <input type="checkbox"/> “paint end” |