

## Suprasegmentals

*Suprasegmentals* (or *prosodics* < Greek ‘sing with, accompanying’) are features that occur *above* the level of segments. They may extend over more than one segment.

1. **TONE:** a pitch that has a phonemic role (= different meaning!)

**Tone language:** A language in which differences in meaning can be signaled by differences in pitch.

e.g., Nupe (spoken in Nigeria)

bá (high)	bā (mid)	bà (low)
‘be sour’	‘cut’	‘count’

**LEVEL or REGISTER TONES:** Tones that do not change pitch (e.g., Nupe).

**CONTOUR TONES:** Tones that change pitch on a single syllable.

e.g. Mandarin

mā	‘mother’	(high level)
má	‘hemp’	(high rising)
mǎ	‘horse’	(low rising)
mà	‘to scold’	(falling)

2. **INTONATION:** the pitch pattern in a sentence.

Acoustic approach to intonation: it is concerned with the physical aspects of the pitch pattern

Linguistic approach to intonation: it concentrates on the correlation between pitch patterns and linguistic features, such as syntax and semantics.

The part of a sentence over which a particular pattern extends is called a *tone group*.

Within the tone group there is usually a single syllable that stands out because it carries the major pitch change: **TONIC SYLLABLE** (most prominent syllable).

3. **STRESS:** The property of a syllable: *syllable prominence*. It is related to the prominence of the syllable in relation to its neighbours.

A stressed syllable is pronounced with a greater amount of energy than an unstressed syllable.

In English three levels of word stress need to be distinguished:

- a. primary (strongest)
- b. secondary (medium)
- c. tertiary (weak)

e.g. 'criti\_cize      'explo\_i\_tation

Stressed syllables:

- a. may be longer
- b. may be louder
- c. the vowel may be more distinct

(e.g. 'expla\_nation)

In English, the vowel in the unstressed syllable is [ə] or [ɪ]



most common!

explanation [ə]

criticism [ɪ]

Stress may have a grammatical role:

<sup>l</sup>subject (NOUN)

sub<sup>l</sup>ject (VERB)

4. **DURATION:** the time that is needed for the articulation of a speech sound. Also, the duration of a segment is frequently conditioned by surrounding segments (see later).

**Length:** phonological term; it refers to *distinctive* duration.

For example:

Finish	t <u>u</u> li ‘fire’	[u]
	tu <u>u</u> li ‘wind’	[u:]

**Geminates:** long consonant

Finnish:	k <u>u</u> ka ‘who’	[k]
	kuk <u>k</u> a ‘flower’	[k:]

Gemination may arise also due to morphological processes:

English unknown [n:]

un-	}	morphemes
known		

**Intrinsic duration:** The duration of a segment as determined by its phonetic quality.

Intrinsic duration of vowels:

- tense vowels (longest)
- diphthongs
- lax vowels

Study Table 4 (p. 16)