An Animated and Narrated Glossary of Terms used in Linguistics

presents

**Tone letter/value**

---

*Tones in Putonghua*

- Tone 1: High flat
- Tone 2: Rising
- Tone 3: Dipping
- Tone 4: Falling

---

Graph showing Hertz over time with lines indicating different tones.
Putonghua Tones (Wee 2004)

Indicating tone

Diacritics
Descriptive labels
Pictorial shapes
Tone Letters (Chao 1930)

Tone contour can be expressed in terms of sequence of tone letters indicating starting, turning and ending points.

Level tones can be [55], [33], [11] etc depending on (i) the kinds of tone contrasts in the language and (ii) the pitch level of the speaker using normal phonation.

Likewise, rising tones can be [15], [35], [13] etc, and falling tones are [51], [42], …

Complex tones can be expressed as a sequence, e.g. [214], [353], …

Tones in Putonghua

Tone 1: High flat = [55]
Tone 2: Rising = [15]
Tone 3: Dipping = [214]
Tone 4: Falling = [51]
Tone value

When tones are expressed in terms of tone letters [1, 2, 3, 4, 5], that expression is known as the tone value of that tone.

E.g. Cantonese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>poem</th>
<th>time</th>
<th>cause</th>
<th>rice</th>
<th>try</th>
<th>matter</th>
<th>know</th>
<th>each</th>
<th>eat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[55]</td>
<td>[21]</td>
<td>[35]</td>
<td>[13]</td>
<td>[33]</td>
<td>[22]</td>
<td>[5]</td>
<td>[3]</td>
<td>[2]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tone Letters (South American)

Tone contour can be expressed in terms of sequence of tone letters indicating starting, turning and ending points. Hyphens are often used to separate each tone letter, e.g. [3-5] is a low falling tone in this system.
Further reading


The End


*An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics.*

Hong Kong Baptist University.