

A Short Overview of the Icelandic Sound System Pronunciation Variants and Phonetic Transcription

X-SAMPA Version

Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson

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1 An Overview of the Icelandic Sound System

Icelandic speech sounds can be divided into two main groups; consonants and vowels. Icelandic consonants can be further divided into four classes: plosives (stops), fricatives (and approximants), nasals, and liquids (laterals and trills/taps). Within the vowel group, a further distinction can be made between monophthongs and diphthongs.

The following table gives an overview of the phonemes of the Icelandic IPA and X-SAMPA symbol set, grouped by the phoneme classes to which they belong (according to the manner of their articulation).

Consonants	IPA	SAMPA	Orthography	IPA	SAMPA	Gloss
Plosives	p	p	<i>bera</i>	[pɛ:ra]	/pɛ:ra/	‘carry’
	p ^h	p_h	<i>pera</i>	[p ^h ɛ:ra]	/p_hɛ:ra/	‘pear’
	t	t	<i>dalur</i>	[ta:lYr]	/ta:lYr/	‘valley’
	t ^h	t_h	<i>tala</i>	[t ^h a:la]	/t_ha:la/	‘talk’
	c	c	<i>gera</i>	[cɛ:ra]	/cɛ:ra/	‘do’
	c_h	c_h	<i>kæla</i>	[c ^h ai:la]	/c_hai:la/	‘cool off’
	k	k	<i>galdur</i>	[kaltYr]	/kaltYr/	‘magic’
	k ^h	k_h	<i>kaldur</i>	[k ^h altYr]	/k_haltYr/	‘cold’
Fricatives	v	v	<i>vera</i>	[vɛ:ra]	/vɛ:ra/	‘be’
	f	f	<i>finna</i>	[fɪna]	/fɪna/	‘find’
	ð	D	<i>viður</i>	[vɪ:ðYr]	/vɪ:DYr/	‘wood’
	θ	T	<i>punnur</i>	[θYnYr]	/TYnYr/	‘thin’
	s	s	<i>sofa</i>	[sɔ:va]	/sO:va/	‘sleep’
	j	j	<i>játa</i>	[jau:ta]	/jau:ta/	‘admit’
	ç	C	<i>hjóla</i>	[çou:la]	/Cou:la/	‘cycle’
	ɣ	G	<i>saga</i>	[sa:ɣa]	/sa:Ga/	‘story’
	x	x	<i>rækta</i>	[raixta]	/raixta/	‘grow’
	h	h	<i>halda</i>	[halta]	/halta/	‘hold’
Nasals	m	m	<i>muna</i>	[mY:na]	/mY:na/	‘remember’
	n	n	<i>næla</i>	[nai:la]	/nai:la/	‘pin’
	ɲ	J	<i>angi</i>	[auɲcɪ]	/auJcɪ/	‘twig’
	ŋ	N	<i>langur</i>	[lauŋkYr]	/lauNkYr/	‘long’
	ɱ	m_0	<i>glampa</i>	[klam̥pa]	/glam_0pa/	‘gleam’
	ɱ	n_0	<i>hnefi</i>	[ɱɛ:vɪ]	/n_0ɛ:vɪ/	‘fist’
	ɲ	J_0	<i>banki</i>	[pauɲcɪ]	/pauJ_0cɪ/	‘bank’
Liquids	ŋ	N_0	<i>hönk</i>	[hœiŋk]	/h9iN_0k/	‘loop’
	l	l	<i>sæla</i>	[sai:la]	/sai:la/	‘bliss’
	ɭ	l_0	<i>velta</i>	[vɛɭta]	/vɛɭ_0ta/	‘roll’
	r	r	<i>fara</i>	[fa:ra]	/fa:ra/	‘go’
	ɾ	r_0	<i>hraði</i>	[ɾa:ði]	/r_0a:DI/	‘speed’

Vowels	IPA	SAMPA	Orthography	IPA	SAMPA	Gloss
Monophthongs	I	I	<i>hitta</i>	[hɪhta]	/hɪhta/	‘meet’
	I:	I:	<i>siður</i>	[sr:ðyr]	/sɪ:DYr/	‘custom’
	i	i	<i>ískra</i>	[iskra]	/iskra/	‘creak’
	i:	i:	<i>nýta</i>	[ni:ta]	/ni:ta/	‘utilize’
	ε	E	<i>nesti</i>	[nɛstɪ]	/nɛstɪ/	‘provisions’
	ε:	E:	<i>lesa</i>	[lɛ:sa]	/lɛ:sa/	‘read’
	a	a	<i>aska</i>	[aska]	/aska/	‘ash’
	a:	a:	<i>aka</i>	[a:ka]	/a:ka/	‘drive’
	Y	Y	<i>undra</i>	[yntra]	/Yntra/	‘surprise’
	Y:	Y:	<i>muna</i>	[mY:na]	/mY:na/	‘remember’
	œ	9	<i>öskur</i>	[œskyr]	/9skYr/	‘scream’
	œ:	9:	<i>böl</i>	[pœ:l]	/p9:l/	‘misfortune’
	u	u	<i>kústur</i>	[k ^h ustyr]	/kustYr/	‘broom’
	u:	u:	<i>súpa</i>	[su:pa]	/su:pa/	‘soup’
	ɔ	O	<i>ostur</i>	[ɔstyr]	/OstYr/	‘cheese’
	ɔ:	O:	<i>nota</i>	[nɔ:ta]	/nO:ta/	‘use’
Diphthongs	au	au	<i>ást</i>	[aust]	/aust/	‘love’
	au:	au:	<i>láta</i>	[lau:ta]	/lau:ta/	‘let’
	ou	ou	<i>ósk</i>	[ousk]	/ousk/	‘wish’
	ou:	ou:	<i>ljós</i>	[ljou:s]	/ljou:s/	‘light’
	ei	ei	<i>einn</i>	[eitn]	/eitn_0/	‘one’
	ei:	ei:	<i>leika</i>	[lei:ka]	/lei:ka/	‘play’
	ai	ai	<i>ætla</i>	[aihtla]	/aihtla/	‘intend’
	ai:	ai:	<i>æfa</i>	[ai:va]	/ai:va/	‘practice’
	œi	9i	<i>haust</i>	[hœist]	/h9ist/	‘autumn’
	œi:	9i:	<i>laus</i>	[lœi:s]	/l9i:s/	‘loose’
	Yi	Yi	<i>hugi</i>	[hYijɪ]	/hYijɪ/	‘mind’
	ɔi	Oi	<i>bogi</i>	[pɔijɪ]	/pOijɪ/	‘bow’

1.1 Consonants

The standard Icelandic consonant system is considered to have the following sounds:

1. Eight plosives – four unaspirated ([p, t, c, k]) and four aspirated ([p_h, t_h, c_h, k_h]). All Icelandic plosives are voiceless (even though the unaspirated ones may occasionally become partly voiced intervocalically).
2. Ten fricatives – four voiced ([v, D, j, G]) and six voiceless ([f, T, s, C, x, h]). The sounds [v] and [j] could just as well be considered approximants, but it is customary to classify them as fricatives.
3. Eight nasals – four voiced ([m, n, J, N]) and four voiceless ([m₀, n₀, J₀, N₀]). Icelandic has nasals with four different places of articulation. Furthermore, all of these nasals can be either voiced or voiceless, so that the nasal system consists of eight sounds.

4. Four liquids – two laterals, one voiced ([l]) and one voiceless ([l_0]), and two trills, one voiced ([r]) and one voiceless ([r_0]). The voiced trill is exceptionally short in initial position and word-internally after a long vowel – only about 1/3 of the length of a normal short consonant. Phonetically, it is thus often more like a tap than a trill. For the sake of consistency, we have chosen to transcribe it as [r] instead of /4/, since there is never any contrast between trills and taps in Icelandic.

1.2 Vowels

Icelandic has eight distinct monophthongs, all of which can be either short or long. These are: [i, I, E, a, Y, 9, u, O; i:, I:, E:, a:, Y:, 9:, u:, O:]. Furthermore, Icelandic has seven diphthongs, five of which can be either short or long: [au, ou, ei, ai, 9i, Yi, Oi; au:, ou:, ei:, ai:, 9i:].

Phonetically, this transcription of some of the vowels is not quite accurate. The Icelandic /a/, for instance, is always transcribed as [a], although it is a central vowel and would more correctly be transcribed as /6/. The vowel /9/ is also more central than the transcription would indicate, and sounds in many cases rather similar to schwa (/@/). However, we have chosen to stick to the tradition here, since that can never cause any misunderstandings.

2 Distributional Characteristics of Individual Sounds

In the following sections, only the X-SAMPA transcription will be shown.

2.1 Plosives

In non-initial position, all plosives are unaspirated in standard pronunciation, such that written *p/t/k* are pronounced [p, t, c/k], respectively – for variants, see 3.1. Furthermore, all plosives are always unaspirated after voiceless consonants, in words like *spila* [spI:la] ‘play’, *lyfta* [lIfta] ‘lift’, *hjarta* [cCar_0ta] ‘heart’.

[k_h]/[k] and [c_h]/[c] are in a near-complementary distribution, the former mainly occurring before back vowels, the latter mainly before front vowels. However, there are some minimal pairs which make it necessary to use two pairs of symbols, such as *kúka* [k_hu:ka] ‘defecate’ vs. *kjúka* [c_hu:ka] ‘phalanx’; *góla* [kou:la] ‘howl’ vs. *gjóla* [cou:la] ‘breeze’.

Written geminate *pp/tt/kk* stand for preaspiration (the sound [h] + an unaspirated short plosive), in words like *hoppa* [hOhpa] ‘jump’, *hattur* [hahtYr] ‘hat’, *þekkja* [TEhca] ‘know’, *þakka* [Tahka] ‘thank’. The same goes for the combinations *p/t/k + l/n/m*, in words like *epli* [EhplI] ‘apple’, *opna* [Ohpna] ‘open’, *ætla* [aihtla] ‘intend’, *vatn* [vahtn_0] ‘water’, *ökli* [9hklI] ‘ankel’, *sakna* [sahkna] ‘miss’, *rytmi* [rIhtmi] ‘rhythm’.

In nonstandard pronunciation, a voiceless glottal stop (/ʔ/) sometimes occurs instead of, or preceding, an unaspirated plosive. Examples: *Bjarni* [pjaʔnɪ] (a man's name), *fótbolti* [fouʔpOI_0tɪ] 'football'.

2.2 Fricatives

In word-internal position, [f, T, x] and [v, D, G], respectively, are for the most part in complementary distribution; the former occurring before voiceless sounds and the latter before voiced sounds (even though [D] also occurs before [s]). This does not at all correspond to the writing conventions. For instance, intervocalic [v] is almost always written *f*, as in *lifa* [lɪ:va] 'live', *sofa* [sO:va] 'sleep' (an exception is *sófi* [sou:fɪ] 'sofa'); [G] is always written *g*, as in *saga* [sa:Ga] 'story', *vegur* [vE:GYr] 'road'; and [x] can represent *k*, *g*, and *x*, as in *blakta* [plaxta] 'flutter', *sagt* [saxt] 'said' (past participle) and *lax* [laxs] 'salmon', respectively (see, however, 3.9).

The sounds [D, G, x] usually do not occur in initial position. However, [x] is used for written *hv*- in a minority variant – see 3.5. [D] is also used initially for written *p*- in reduced forms of some pronouns and adverbs in continuous speech, such as [DaD], [Dar], [Dau] instead of [TaD], [Tar], [Tau] for *það* 'it', *þar* 'there', *þá* 'then'.

[C] only occurs in initial position, in words beginning with written *hj*- or *hé*-, such as *hjá*, [Cau:] 'by', *hjarta* [Car_0ta] 'heart', [CE:r] *hér* 'here'.

[h] occurs initially and as the first sound in non-initial parts of compounds. It also occurs word-internally in preaspiration constructions, written *pp/tt/kk* and *p/t/k + l/n*, as mentioned in 2.1.

2.3 Nasals

Of the eight nasals, [m] and [n] can be considered basic; all the others may be considered to be derived from these two in special environments. However, we can find phonemic contrasts which warrant the use of special symbols for these eight sounds.

The voiceless nasals occurs in medial position before written *p/t/k* (in standard pronunciation, see also 3.2). Furthermore, [n_0] represents written *hn*- in initial position, in words such as *hnífur* [n_Oi:vYr] 'knife', *hné* [n_0jE:] 'knee'.

In writing, [J, J_0] are always represented by the combination *ng* or *nk* where *g/k* stands for a palatal plosive, [c/c_h]; [N, N_0] are always represented by the combinations *ng* or *nk* where *g/k* stands for a velar plosive, [k/k_h].

2.4 Liquids

The voiceless lateral only occurs in word-internal position before written *p/t/k* (in standard pronunciation, see also 3.2) and in initial position in words written with *hl-*, such as *hlaupa* [l_09i:pa], ‘run’, *hlusta* [l_0Ysta] ‘listen’.

The voiceless trill only occurs in word-internal position before written *p/t/k/s*, in words like *harpa* [har_0pa] ‘harp’, *hjarta* [Car_0ta] ‘heart’, *harka* [har_0ka] ‘hardness’, *hirsi* [hIr_0sI] ‘millet’, and in initial position in words written with *hr-*, like *hrjóta* [r_0jou:ta] ‘snore’, *hrjúfur* [rju:vYr] ‘tough’.

There are phonemic contrasts between the voiced and the voiceless liquids which make it necessary to use special symbols for the voiceless variants.

2.5 Vowels

All the monophthongs and most of the diphthongs have a very free distribution – they can occur initially, word-internally and finally, before and after many different consonants. The diphthongs [Yi] and [Oi], however, only occur in a special environment (before [jI], as in *hugi* [hYijI] ‘mind’ and *bogi* [pOijI] ‘bow’) and can only be short, whereas all the other diphthongs have a relatively free distribution and can be either short or long.

2.6 Length

A number of Icelandic consonants (/p, t, c, k, f, s, m, n, l, r/) can be (phonologically) long word-internally and in final position, but Icelandic does not have syllables of the type V:C:, that is, a long vowel followed by a long consonant. From a phonological point of view, consonant length must be considered basic, since the length of the preceding vowel is determined by the phonemic length of the following consonant (short vowel before a long consonant or a consonant cluster, with the exception of a few well defined clusters – *p/t/k/s* + *v/j/r*). Phonetically, however, the difference in duration between “long” and “short” consonants is often negligible, whereas the difference between long and short vowels is much more salient. Therefore, we have not found it necessary to mark consonant length in the transcription and pairs with phonologically short vs. long consonants are thus transcribed like this:

V:C	Transcription	Gloss	VC	Transcription	Gloss
<i>bisa</i>	[pI:sa]	‘struggle’	vs. <i>byssa</i>	[pIsa]	‘gun’
<i>koma</i>	[k_hO:ma]	‘come’	vs. <i>komma</i>	[kOma]	‘comma’

3. Regional Variation in Pronunciation

Dialectal differences in Icelandic pronunciation are negligible. However, some regional variation can be found, even though dialect borders have become blurred in the past few decades due to migration and influence of mass media.

3.1

As mentioned in 2.1, all plosives are unaspirated in non-initial (pre-vocalic) and final position in standard pronunciation, such that written *p/t/k* are pronounced [p, t, c/k], respectively. In Northern Iceland, however, plosives are often aspirated in these positions (so-called “*harðmæli*”, ‘hard speech’). Thus, we have the following variation:

Orthography	Standard pronunciation	Northern variant	Gloss
<i>hrópa</i>	[r_0ou:pa]	[r_0ou:p_ha]	‘shout’
<i>vitur</i>	[vI:tYr]	[vI:t_hYr]	‘wise’
<i>þekja</i>	[TE:ca]	[TE:c_ha]	‘cover’
<i>veikur</i>	[vei:kYr]	[vei:k_hYr]	‘ill’

This is by far the most common deviation from the standard pronunciation. Many speakers also have “mixed” pronunciation – sometimes they use the aspirated plosives and sometimes the unaspirated ones. The aspirated plosives are often associated with more formal registers – for instance, some speakers who usually use unaspirated plosives may use the aspirated plosives when reading aloud or giving a speech.

3.2

In Northern Iceland, especially in the Eyjafjörður and Þingeyjarsýsla area, nasals and some laterals can be voiced before written *p/t/k* (so-called “voiced pronunciation”). Furthermore, voiced [D] is used before *k* instead of standard [T]. Thus, we have the following variation:

Orthography	Standard pronunciation	North-Eastern variant	Gloss
<i>hempa</i>	[hEm_0pa]	[hEmp_ha]	‘robe’
<i>heimta</i>	[heim_0ta]	[heimt_ha]	‘demand’
<i>aumka</i>	[9im_0ka]	[9imk_ha]	‘pity’
<i>vanta</i>	[van_0ta]	[vant_ha]	‘need’
<i>banki</i>	[pauJ_0cI]	[pauJc_hI]	‘bank’
<i>banka</i>	[pauN_0ka]	[pauNk_ha]	‘knock’
<i>hjálpa</i>	[Caul_0pa]	[Caulp_ha]	‘help’
<i>fálki</i>	[faul_0cI]	[faulc_hI]	‘falcon’
<i>maðkur</i>	[maTkYr]	[maDk_hYr]	‘worm’

Note that most words with *lt* have voiceless [l_0], even in the North-Eastern variant – [p_hI_l_0tYr], [El_0ta] for *piltur* ‘boy’, *elta* ‘follow’, not *[p_hI_l_t_hYr], *[El_t_ha]. The trill [r_0] is always voiceless in this environment in all dialects.

There is a certain relationship between this variant and the one described in 3.1. The voiced pronunciation implies aspirated plosives, whereas the converse does not hold. Thus, variants like *[vanta] for *vanta* do not exist ([vanta] surely exists, but only as the normal pronunciation of *vanda*, ‘do carefully’).

3.3

In standard pronunciation, *g* [k] is never pronounced in the cluster *ngl*. However, some speakers in Northern Iceland, especially in the Eyjafjörður area, retain [k] in this cluster. Thus, we have the following variation:

Orthography	Standard pronunciation	Northern variant	Gloss
<i>kringla</i>	[k_hriNla]	[k_hriNkla]	‘disk’
<i>englar</i>	[eiNlar]	[eiNklar]	‘angels’

Speakers who use this variant usually also use the variants described in 3.1 and 3.2.

3.4

A few speakers in Northern Iceland, almost exclusively over 60, use labial and velar plosives instead of fricatives before [D]. Thus, we have the following variation:

Orthography	Standard pronunciation	Northern variant	Gloss
<i>hafði</i>	[havDI]	[hapDI]	‘had’
<i>sagði</i>	[saGDI]	[sakDI]	‘said’

Speakers who use this variant usually also use the variants described in 3.1 and 3.2. This variant appears to be disappearing.

3.5

Words beginning in written *hv-* (most of them question words like *hver* ‘who’, *hvenær* ‘when’, etc.) have [k_hv] in standard pronunciation. However, [x] is used instead in these words in a minority variant spoken in Southern Iceland, as mentioned in 2.2 (so-called “*hv*-pronunciation”). Actually, this variant has two sub-variants (so-called “unrounded” vs. “rounded *hv*-pronunciation”). Thus, we have the following variation:

Orthography	Standard pronunciation	Southern variant A	Southern variant B	Gloss
<i>hver</i>	[k_hvE:r]	[xE:r]	[x_wE:r]	‘who’
<i>hvenær</i>	[k_hvE:nair]	[xE:nair]	[x_wE:nair]	‘when’

These variants and the variants described in 3.1-3.4 are mutually exclusive – pronunciation like *[xE:t_hja] (with an aspirated plosive) for *hvetja* ‘urge’ or *[xOl_p_hYr] (with a voiced lateral and an aspirated plosive) for *hvolpur* ‘puppy’ does not exist.

3.6

In standard pronunciation, vowels are diphthongized and shortened before *gi* [jI]. Thus, we often get a variation between short diphthongs and long monophthongs in inflectional paradigms: [haijI] *hagi* ‘pasture’ (nom.) vs. [ha:Ga] *haga* ‘pasture’ (acc./dat./gen.); [vE:-GYr] *vegur* ‘road’ vs. [veijIr] *vegir* ‘roads’. In Southern Iceland, however, long monophthongs are sometimes retained in this environment. Thus, we have the following variation:

Orthography	Standard pronunciation	Southern variant	Gloss
<i>hagi</i>	[haijI]	[ha:jI]	‘pasture’
<i>vegir</i>	[veijIr]	[vE:jIr]	‘roads’

This variant and the variants described in 3.1-3.4 are mutually exclusive. On the other hand, this variant can co-occur with the variants described in 3.5 and most speakers using those variants will probably also use this one. A compound word like *hvíldardaginn* ‘day of rest’ (acc.def.art.) can thus have five different pronunciations: [‘k_hviltar,taijIn] (standard pronunciation), [‘xiltar,taijIn], [‘x^wiltar,taijIn], [‘xiltar,ta:jIn], [‘x^wiltar,ta:jIn].

3.7

In standard pronunciation, [t] is inserted in clusters with *rl* and *rn*. In some cases, [t] replaces the [r] entirely. However, a few speakers in South-Eastern Iceland do not insert [t] in these clusters. Thus, we have the following variation:

Orthography	Standard pronunciation	South-Eastern variant	Gloss
<i>karlinn</i>	[k_hartIIn], [k_hatIIn]	[k_harIIn]	‘the old man’
<i>barnið</i>	[partnID], [patnID]	[parnID]	‘the child’

Speakers who use this variant may also use the variants described in 3.5 and 3.6. This variant appears to be disappearing. We recommend using the [rtn]/[rtl] variant.

3.8

In standard pronunciation, monophthongs do not occur before palatal and velar nasals ([J, J_0, N, N_0]) – instead, diphthongs are used. In the Western Fjords, however, the monophthongs are sometimes retained. Thus, we have the following variation:

Orthography	Standard pronunciation	Western variant	Gloss
<i>tangi</i>	[t_hauJcI]	[t_haJcI]	‘spit’
<i>banki</i>	[pauJ_0cI]	[paJ_0cI]	‘bank’
<i>þröngur</i>	[Tr9iNkYr]	[Tr9NkYr]	‘narrow’
<i>hönk</i>	[h9iN_0k]	[h9N_0k]	‘loop’

This variant and all the variants described in 3.1-3.5 are mutually exclusive. Thus, pronunciations like *[paNc_hI] (with a voiced nasal) for *banki* ‘bank’ or *[‘xa:lfaNk_arI] (with an initial [x] instead of [k_hv]) for *hvalfangari* ‘whaler’ do not exist.

3.9

Until recently, words written with *ks*, *gs* and *x* used to be pronounced with a voiceless velar fricative, [x]. Some speakers, especially people over 60, retain this pronunciation, but the great majority of speakers now use the unaspirated velar plosive in these words instead. Thus, we have the following variation:

Orthography	Standard pronunciation	Older variant	Gloss
<i>baksa</i>	[paksa]	[paxsa]	‘struggle’
<i>slugsa</i>	[stlYksa]	[stlYxsa]	‘procrastinate’
<i>vaxa</i>	[vaksa]	[vaxsa]	‘grow’

Both the standard pronunciation and the older variant can co-occur with all variants described above (except probably those in 3.4 and 3.7 which are only used by older people).

4. Mapping Orthography to Phonetic Transcription

This section describes how normal orthography can be mapped to phonetic (X-SAMPA) transcription. In most cases, only standard pronunciation is shown, but three regional variants are also included: Northern variant (“harðmæli”, 3.1), North-Eastern variant (voiced pronunciation, 3.2) and Southern variant (*hv*-pronunciation, 3.5). Of course, a mapping like this must be seen as a rough approximation. In many cases, there are other pronunciation possibilities, especially as regards consonant clusters (see also Section 5 below).

The transcription describes the pronunciation of individual words, and in continuous speech, adjacent words can affect each other in various ways. For instance, a nasal in final position can assimilate to an initial plosive in the following word; a voiced consonant in final position can become partly or completely voiceless in utterance-final position or preceding a word beginning with a voiceless consonant; and so on.

One important factor not illustrated here is the effect of morpheme boundaries. In compounds, phonetic processes usually apply in each part of the compound independently, but the picture gets more complicated when it comes to the boundaries between roots and affixes. Some affixes behave like parts of compounds in this respect, whereas in other cases, phonetic processes apply between roots and affixes as if there were no boundaries.

In some cases, the same affix can behave differently in different words. Thus, *-legur*, which is by far the most common affix in Icelandic, usually behaves like a part of a compound, barring phonetic processes, as in *heil-legur* ‘seemingly intact’ [heilEGYr]. However, in the (much more frequent) word *fal-legur* ‘beautiful’, speakers don’t seem to be aware of the boundary (since the modern meaning of the word is quite far from the origin in *falur* ‘available, for sale’) and the word is pronounced [fatlEGYr] with [tl].

Cases like *fallegur* must be listed as an exception, but generally, it is necessary to have information on morpheme boundaries in order to be able to pronounce and transcribe words correctly. Thus, it must be emphasized that the following description is only meant to cover words composed of roots and inflectional endings – affixed words may behave differently.

The following symbols and abbreviations are used in the transcriptions:

#	word boundary (beginning or end of a word)
–	non-initial position
+	any position
V	any vowel
J	any of <i>j, æ, í, i, e, é, y, ý, ei, ey</i>
N	Northern variant (“harðmæli”, 3.1)
NE	North-Eastern variant (voiced pronunciation, 3.2)
S	Southern variant (<i>hv</i> -pronunciation, 3.5)

4.1 Consonants

b

The letter *b* usually stands for an unaspirated labial plosive. Both single *b* and geminate *bb* are usually transcribed [p] except in certain clusters listed below.

	Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription
	– m b d	mt	<i>rembdist</i>	[rEmtIst]
	– m b s	ms	<i>lambs</i>	[lams]
NE	– m b t	mt	<i>kembt</i>	[c_hEmt_h]
	– m b t	mt	<i>kembt</i>	[c_hEm_0t]
	– bb	p	<i>gabba</i>	[kapa]
	+ b	p	<i>bera</i>	[pE:ra] elsewhere

d

The letter *d* stands for an unaspirated alveolar plosive. Both single *d* and geminate *dd* are transcribed [t].

	Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription
	– dd	t	<i>mæddur</i>	[maitYr]
	+ d	t	<i>dagur</i>	[ta:GYr]

ð

The letter *ð* only occurs in word-internal and final position. Except for certain clusters, it always stands for the voiced alveolar fricative [D], except before *k* where it is devoiced and becomes [T]. In the North-Eastern variant, however, *ð* is voiced in this position.

	Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription
	– r ð l	rtl	<i>sperðlar</i>	[spErtlar]
	– r ð n	rtn	<i>harðna</i>	[hartna]
NE	– ð k	Dk_h	<i>blaðka</i>	[plaDk_ha]
	– ð k	Tk	<i>blaðka</i>	[plaTka]
	– ð	D	<i>veður</i>	[vE:DYr] elsewhere

f

In initial position, the letter *f* always stands for the voiceless labiodental fricative [f]. Word-internally and finally, it stands for the voiceless labial plosive [p] before [l] and [n], but otherwise, it usually stands for voiced [v], except in certain clusters listed below. Geminate *ff* always stands for [f].

	Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription	
#	f	f	<i>fara</i>	[fa:ra]	
–	f ld	lt	<i>efldi</i>	[EltI]	
–	f lt	l_Ot	<i>teflt</i>	[t_hEl_Ot]	
–	f l	p	<i>efla</i>	[Epla]	
–	f nd	m	<i>hefndi</i>	[hEmtI]	
NE	f nt	mt_h	<i>jafnt</i>	[jamt_h]	
–	f nt	m_Ot	<i>jafnt</i>	[jam_Ot]	
–	f n	p	<i>hafna</i>	[hapna]	
– l	f d	lt	<i>hvolfdi</i>	[k_hvOltI]	
– l	f t	l_Ot	<i>tólfthi</i>	[t_houl_OtI]	
– r	f ð	rD	<i>horfði</i>	[hOrDI]	
– r	f l	rtl	<i>hvarfla</i>	[k_hvartla]	
– r	f n	rtn	<i>horfnir</i>	[hOrtnIr]	
– r	f st	r_Ost	<i>horfst</i>	[hOr_Ost]	
– r	f t	r_Ot	<i>horft</i>	[hOr_Ot]	
–	f s	f	<i>ofsi</i>	[OfsI]	
–	f t	f	<i>aftur</i>	[aftYr]	
–	ff	f	<i>kaffi</i>	[k_hafI]	
–	f V	f	<i>sófi</i>	[sou:fI]	a few loanwords
–	f	v	<i>sofa</i>	[sO:va]	elsewhere

g

The letter *g* can stand for a number of different (yet related) sounds. In initial position, *g* stands for an unaspirated palatal plosive [c] before *j*, *æ* and the front unrounded vowels, *i*, *í*, *e*, *é*, *y*, *ý*, *ei*, *ey* (henceforth referred to as J), or an unaspirated velar plosive [k] elsewhere (however, *g* is also transcribed [k] before *æ* in certain loanwords, such as *gæd* ‘guide’). In word-internal and final position, *g* after a vowel stands for a voiced palatal fricative [j] before J. After vowels and before [D], [r] and vowels and word-finally, *g* stands for a voiced velar fricative [G]. Before [t], *g* stands for a voiceless fricative [x]. After diphthongs with [u] as their second part, *á*, *ó*, *ú*, and before vowels other than *i*, *g* is silent. In many consonant clusters, *g* is omitted. In other cases, single *g* and geminate *gg* is transcribed [k].

	Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription
#	g J	c	<i>gil</i>	[cI:l]
#	g	k	<i>gata</i>	[ka:ta]
–	g ld	lt	<i>sigldi</i>	[sIltI]

–	g	lt	l_Ot	<i>siglt</i>	[sIl_Ot]	
–	g	nd	Nt	<i>rigndi</i>	[rINtI]	
NE	–	g	nst	Nst	<i>skyggnst</i>	[scINst]
–	g	nst	N_Ost	<i>skyggnst</i>	[scIN_Ost]	
NE	–	g	nt	Nt_h	<i>hrygnt</i>	[r_0INt_h]
–	g	nt	N_Ot	<i>hrygnt</i>	[r_0INt]	
– l	g	d	lt	<i>fylgdi</i>	[fIlItI]	
– l	g	t	l_Ot	<i>fylgt</i>	[fIl_Ot]	
– l	g	n	ln	<i>volgna</i>	[vOlna]	
– n	g	d	Nt	<i>hringdi</i>	[r_0iNtI]	
– n	g	s	Ns	<i>hangs</i>	[hauNs]	
NE	– n	g	t	Nt_h	<i>tengt</i>	[t_heiNt_h]
– n	g	t	N_Ot	<i>tengt</i>	[t_heiN_Ot]	
– r	g	ð	rD	<i>mergð</i>	[mErD]	
– r	g	n	rtn	<i>morgna</i>	[mOrtna]	
– r	g	t	r_Ot	<i>margt</i>	[mar_Ot]	
– V	g	i	j	<i>hagi</i>	[haijI]	
– V*	g	V	V	<i>mágar</i>	[mau:ar]	V* = á, ó, ú
– V	g	r	G	<i>sigra</i>	[sIGra]	
–	g	ð	G	<i>sagði</i>	[saGDI]	
– V	g		G	<i>saga</i>	[sa:Ga]	elsewhere
–	g	t	x	<i>sagt</i>	[saxt]	
–	gg	J	c	<i>byggja</i>	[pIca]	
–	gg		k	<i>snöggur</i>	[stn9kYr]	
–	gg		t	<i>snögg</i>	[stn9xt]	
–	gg		k	<i>hagga</i>	[haka]	
–	g		K	<i>regla</i>	[rEkla]	elsewhere

h

The letter *h* only occurs in initial position (and as the first letter in non-initial parts of compounds) except for some personal names where it is silent, such as *Thor*, *Theódóra* and a few others. It usually stands for an unvoiced glottal fricative [h] except before *j*, *é*, *n*, *l* and *r*, where it is realized as devoicing of the following consonant. In the combination *hv*, *h* is an aspirated velar plosive [k_h] in standard pronunciation, but in the Southern variant, it is a voiceless velar fricative [x]. Furthermore, *h* is usually silent in continuous speech in the pronouns *hann* ‘he’ and *hún* ‘she’, and also in the different forms of *hafa* ‘have’.

	Cluster		SAMPA	Example	Transcription
#	h	j	C	<i>hjóla</i>	[Cou:la]
#	h	é	C	<i>hér</i>	[CE:r]
#	h	n	n_0	<i>hnefi</i>	[n_0E:vI]
#	h	l	l_0	<i>hlusta</i>	[l_0Ysta]

	#	h	r	r_0	<i>hreyfa</i>	[r_0ei:va]	
S	#	h	v	x	<i>hvar</i>	[xa:r]	
	#	h	v	k_h	<i>hvar</i>	[k_hva:r]	
	#	h		h	<i>hafa</i>	[ha:va]	elsewhere

j

The letter *j* occurs initially and word-internally. It merges with *h* in initial position, resulting in the voiceless palatal fricative [C]. After the velar plosives *k* and *g* in initial position, it is realized as palatalization of the plosive, [c_h] and [c]. The same goes for *j* after *k* word-internally, but the combination *gj* is realized as [j]. In other environments, *j* stands for a voiced palatal fricative (or approximant) and is transcribed [j].

		Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription	
	#	k j	c_h	<i>kjáni</i>	[c_hau:nI]	
	#	g j	c	<i>gjá</i>	[cau:]	
	#	h j	C	<i>hjarta</i>	[Car_0ta]	
N	–	k j	c_h	<i>rekja</i>	[rE:c_ha]	
	–	k j	c	<i>rekja</i>	[rE:ca]	
	–	g j	j	<i>lægja</i>	[laija]	
	+	j	j	<i>já</i>	[jau:]	elsewhere

k

In initial position, *k* stands for an aspirated palatal plosive [c_h] before *j*, *æ* and the front unrounded vowels, *i*, *í*, *e*, *é*, *y*, *ý*, *ei*, *ey* (henceforth referred to as J), or an aspirated velar plosive [k_h] elsewhere (however, *k* is also transcribed [k_h] before *æ* in certain loanwords, such as *kæi* ‘quay’). In word-internal position, a similar distribution between palatal and velar plosives is found; thus, *k* is either transcribed [c] before J or [k] (elsewhere) in standard pronunciation, except in certain combinations listed below. In the Northern variant, *k* is transcribed [c_h] word-internally before J but [k_h] before other vowels and *v*, *r*. Geminate *kk* is transcribed [hc] before J but as [hk] elsewhere, except before *t*. Note that plosives are always unaspirated after voiceless consonants.

		Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription	
	#	c J	c_h	<i>kyssa</i>	[c_hIsa]	
	#	k	k_h	<i>koma</i>	[k_hO:ma]	
N	–	k j	c_h	<i>vekja</i>	[vE:c_ha]	
N	–	k V	k_h	<i>vaka</i>	[va:k_ha]	
N	–	k v	k_h	<i>skrökva</i>	[skr9:k_hva]	
N	–	k r	k_h	<i>dekra</i>	[tE:k_hra]	
NE	–	l k	k_h	<i>hálka</i>	[haulk_ha]	
NE	–	m k	k_h	<i>aumka</i>	[9imk_ha]	
NE	–	n k J	c_h	<i>hanki</i>	[hauJc_hI]	
NE	–	n k	k_h	<i>banka</i>	[paunk_ha]	
	–	k J	c	<i>ríki</i>	[ri:cI]	

–	kk	t	x	<i>slökkti</i>	[stl9xtI]	
–	kk	J	hc	<i>blekkja</i>	[plEhca]	
–	kk		hk	<i>drekkja</i>	[trEhka]	elsewhere
–	k	l	hk	<i>ekla</i>	[Ehkla]	
–	k	n	hk	<i>lækna</i>	[laihkna]	
–	k	t	x	<i>rakti</i>	[raxtI]	
–	k		k	<i>baka</i>	[pa:ka]	elsewhere

l

The letter *l* stands for an alveolar lateral sound, either voiced [l] or voiceless [l_0]. It is voiceless after an initial *h*, and in standard pronunciation before *p*, *t*, *k*. In the North-Eastern variant, it is voiced before *p* and *k*, but usually voiceless before *t*, even though it can be voiced in some words. In other cases, it is voiced. In the clusters *rl* and *sl*, [t] is inserted between [s] and [l]. Geminate *ll* usually stands for [tl], except in loan words, pet names and before [s] (at least in frequent words), where it stands for [l].

	Cluster			SAMPA	Example	Transcription	
	#	h	l	l_0	<i>hlusta</i>	[l_0Ysta]	
	–	s	l	stl	<i>slá</i>	[stlau:]	
	–	r	l	rtl	<i>árla</i>	[aurtla]	
NE	–		l	p	<i>hjálpa</i>	[Caulp_ha]	
	–		l	p	<i>hjálpa</i>	[Caul_0pa]	
	–		l	t	<i>bolti</i>	[pOl_0tI]	
NE	–		l	k	<i>mjólka</i>	[mjoulk_ha]	
	–		l	k	<i>mjólka</i>	[mjoul_0ka]	
	–		ll	t	<i>allt</i>	[al_0t]	
	–		ll	s	<i>alls</i>	[als]	
	–		ll	V	<i>pilla</i>	[p_hIla]	loan words, pet names
	–		ll	#	<i>ball</i>	[pal]	loan words, pet names
	–		ll		<i>bolli</i>	[pOtI]	elsewhere
+			l		<i>bóla</i>	[pou:la]	elsewhere

m

The letter *m* stands for a bilabial nasal, either voiced [m] or voiceless [m_0]. In standard pronunciation, it is voiceless before *p*, *t*, *k*, whereas in the North-Eastern variant, it is voiced in these combinations. In all other cases, *m* is voiced. Geminate *mm* is also transcribed [m].

	Cluster			SAMPA	Example	Transcription
–	m	p		m	<i>hempa</i>	[hEmp_ha]
–	m	p		m_0	<i>hempa</i>	[hEm_0pa]
–	m	t		m	<i>heimta</i>	[heimt_ha]
–	m	t		m_0	<i>heimta</i>	[heim_0ta]
–	m	k		m	<i>aumka</i>	[9imk_ha]

–	m	k	m_0	<i>aumka</i>	[9im_0ka]
–	mm		m	<i>skamma</i>	[skama]
+	m		m	<i>tómur</i>	[t_hou:mYr] elsewhere

n

The letter *n* usually stands for an alveolar nasal, either voiced [n] or voiceless [n_0]. It is voiceless after an initial *h* and also before *t* in standard pronunciation, whereas in the North-Eastern variant, it is voiced in this position. Before palatal plosives, [c] and [c_h], *n* stands for palatal nasals, either voiced [J] or voiceless [J_0], and before velar plosives, [k] and [k_h], *n* stands for velar nasals, either voiced [N] or unvoiced [N_0]. In standard pronunciation, the palatal and velar nasals are voiceless before *k*, whereas in the North-Eastern variant, they are voiced in this position. In the clusters *rn* and *sn*, [t] is inserted between [s] and [n]. Geminate *nn* is transcribed [tn] after diphthongs, *í* and *ú*, but [n] elsewhere.

	Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription
	# h n	n_0	<i>hneta</i>	[n_0E:ta]
	– s n	stn	<i>snerta</i>	[stnEr_0ta]
	– r n	rtn	<i>fórna</i>	[fourtna]
	– f n d	mt	<i>hefndi</i>	[hEmtI]
NE	– f n t	nt_h	<i>jafnt</i>	[jamt_h]
	– f n t	n_0t	<i>jafnt</i>	[jam_0t]
	– g n d	Nt	<i>rigndi</i>	[rINtI]
NE	– g n t	Nt_h	<i>hrygnt</i>	[r_0INt_h]
	– g n t	N_0t	<i>hrygnt</i>	[r_0IN_0t]
NE	– k n t	nt_h	<i>síkn</i>	[sint_h]
	– k n t	n_0t	<i>síkn</i>	[sin_0t]
NE	– n t	nt_h	<i>vanta</i>	[vant_ha]
	– n t	n_0t	<i>vanta</i>	[van_0ta]
	– n skt	nst	<i>finnskt</i>	[fInst]
	– n gJ	Jc	<i>angi</i>	[auJcI]
NE	– n kJ	Jc_h	<i>banki</i>	[pauJc_hI]
	– n kJ	J_0c	<i>banki</i>	[pauJ_0cI]
NE	– n kt	nt_h	<i>punktur</i>	[p_hunt_hYr]
	– n kt	n_0t	<i>punktur</i>	[p_hun_0tYr]
NE	– n k	Nk_h	<i>blankur</i>	[plauNk_hYr]
	– n k	N_0k	<i>blankur</i>	[plauN_0kYr]
	– n gd	Nt	<i>hringdi</i>	[r_0iNtI]
	– n gl	Ngl	<i>kringla</i>	[k_hriNla]
	– n gn	Nn	<i>tungna</i>	[t_huNna]
	– n gs	Ns	<i>hangs</i>	[hauNs]
NE	– n gt	Nt_h	<i>tengt</i>	[t_heiNt_h]
	– n gt	N_0t	<i>tengt</i>	[t_heiN_0t]
	– n g	Nk	<i>hanga</i>	[hauNka]

–	V*	nn	tn	<i>seinna</i>	[seitna]	V* = á/í/ó/ú/ý/æ/au/ei/ey
–	V*	nn	n	<i>brúnna</i>	[pruna]	except with def. art.
–		nn	n	<i>finna</i>	[fIna]	elsewhere
+		n	n	<i>vona</i>	[vO:na]	elsewhere

p

In initial position, *p* always stands for an aspirated bilabial plosive [p_h]. In word-internal position, it is usually unaspirated and transcribed [p] in standard pronunciation, except in certain combinations listed below. In the Northern variant, it is usually transcribed [p_h] word-internally before vowels and *j*, *r*. Geminate *pp* is always transcribed [hp] except before *t*. Note that plosives are always unaspirated after voiceless consonants.

	Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription	
#	p	p_h	<i>pera</i>	[p_hE:ra]	
N	– p V	p_h	<i>gapa</i>	[ka:p_ha]	
N	– p j	p_h	<i>nepja</i>	[nE:p_hja]	
N	– p r	p_h	<i>tepra</i>	[t_hE:p_hra]	
N	– l p	p_h	<i>hjálpa</i>	[Caulp_ha]	
NE	– m p	p_h	<i>glampa</i>	[klamp_ha]	
–	pp t	f	<i>keppti</i>	[cEftI]	
–	pp	hp	<i>stoppa</i>	[stOhpa]	elsewhere
–	p l	hp	<i>epli</i>	[EhpI]	
–	p n	hp	<i>opna</i>	[Ohpna]	
–	p t	f	<i>æpti</i>	[aiftI]	
–	p	p	<i>hrópa</i>	[r_0ou:pa]	elsewhere

r

The letter *r* stands for an alveolar trill (or tap, in initial position and after a long vowel), either voiced [r] or voiceless [r_0]. It is voiceless after an initial *h* and before *p*, *t*, *k*, *s*. In the clusters *rn* and *rl*, [t] is inserted between [r] and [n]/[l]. In many such words (but not all), *r* can be omitted altogether, resulting in [tn] and [tl] for *rn* and *rl*, respectively, but we have chosen to stick to the variant where *r* is retained.

	Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription	
#	h r	r_0	<i>hraði</i>	[r_0a:DI]	
–	r n	rtn	<i>gjarna</i>	[cartna]	
–	r l	rtl	<i>snörla</i>	[stn9rtla]	
–	r p	r_0	<i>harpa</i>	[har_0pa]	
–	r t	r_0	<i>hjarta</i>	[Car_0ta]	
–	r k	r_0	<i>harka</i>	[har_0ka]	
–	r s	r_0	<i>hirsí</i>	[hIr_0sI]	
–	rr	r	<i>hærra</i>	[haira]	
+	r	r	<i>vera</i>	[vE:ra]	elsewhere

s

The letter *s* stands for an alveolar fricative (spirant) and occurs initially, word-internally and finally. Both single *s* and geminate *ss* are always transcribed [s].

t

In initial position, *t* always stands for an aspirated alveolar plosive [t_h]. In word-internal position, it is usually unaspirated and transcribed [t] in standard pronunciation, except in certain combinations listed below. In the Northern variant, it is usually transcribed [t_h] word-internally before vowels and *j*, *v*, *r*. Geminate *tt* is always transcribed [ht]. Note that plosives are always unaspirated after voiceless consonants.

	Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription	
#	t	t_h	<i>tala</i>	[t_ha:la]	
N	– t V	t_h	<i>vita</i>	[vI:t_ha]	
N	– t j	t_h	<i>etja</i>	[E:t_hja]	
N	– t v	t_h	<i>götva</i>	[k9:t_hva]	
N	– t r	t_h	<i>eitra</i>	[ei:t_hra]	
NE	– m t	t_h	<i>heimta</i>	[heimt_ha]	
NE	– n t	t_h	<i>vanta</i>	[vant_ha]	
	– tt	ht	<i>fletta</i>	[flEhta]	
	– t l	ht	<i>kitla</i>	[c_hlhtl_0a]	
	– t n	ht	<i>botna</i>	[pOhtna]	
	– t	t	<i>nota</i>	[nO:ta]	elsewhere

v

The letter *v* occurs both initially and word-internally and always stands for the voiced labiodental fricative [v].

x

The letter *x* only occurs in word-internal and final position. It used to stand for a voiceless velar fricative + [s], [xs]. For most speakers under 60, however, it now stands for an unaspirated velar plosive + [s], [ks]. We recommend using the latter transcription.

þ

The letter *þ* only occurs in initial position (and as the first letter in non-initial parts of compounds), except for a few loanwords like *kabóliskur* ‘catholic’. It usually stands for a voiceless alveolar fricative and is transcribed as [T]. In continuous speech, however, *þ* often becomes voiced, [D], in short function words (pronouns and adverbs), such as *þú* ‘you’, *þeir/þær/þau* ‘they’, *þá* ‘then’, *þar* ‘there’, *þegar* ‘when’.

	Cluster	SAMPA	Example	Transcription	
#	þ	D	<i>þar</i>	[Dar]	short function words
+	þ	T	<i>þurfa</i>	[TYrva]	elsewhere

4.2 Vowels

a

The letter *a* stands for a low back unrounded vowel. It is transcribed [a] except before *ng* and *nk*, where it is diphthongized as [au], and before *gi*, where it is diphthongized as [ai]. In stressed syllables, the vowel is short [a] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [a:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position). Furthermore, *a* can be the first element of the diphthong *au* which can also be either short [9i] or long [9i:] under the same conditions as monophthongs.

á

The letter *á* stands for a diphthong which is transcribed [au]. In stressed syllables, the diphthong is short [au] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [au:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position).

e

The letter *e* stands for a low-mid front unrounded vowel. It is transcribed [E] except before *ng*, *nk* and *gi*, where it is diphthongized as [ei]. In stressed syllables, the vowel is short [E] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [E:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position). Furthermore, *e* can be the first element of the diphthong *ei* which can also be either short [ei] or long [ei:] under the same conditions as monophthongs.

é

The letter *é* usually stands for the combination [jE]. The combination *hé*, however, stands for the voiceless palatal fricative [C] + [E]. In stressed syllables, the vowel is short [E] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [E:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position).

i

The letter *i* stands for a high-mid front unrounded vowel. It is transcribed [I] except before *ng*, *nk* and *gi*, where it usually appears as [i]. In stressed syllables, the vowel is short [I] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [I:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position). Furthermore, *i* can be the second element of the diphthong *ei* which can also be either short [ei] or long [ei:] under the same conditions as monophthongs.

í

The letter *í* stands for a high front unrounded vowel which is transcribed [i]. In stressed syllables, the vowel is short [i] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [i:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position).

o

The letter *o* stands for a low-mid back rounded vowel. It is transcribed [O] except before *ng* and *nk*, where it is diphthongized as [ou], and before *gi*, where it is diphthongized as [Oi]. In stressed syllables, the vowel is short [O] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [O:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position).

ó

The letter *ó* stands for a diphthong which is transcribed [ou]. In stressed syllables, the diphthong is short [ou] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [ou:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position).

u

The letter *u* stands for a high-mid front rounded vowel. It is transcribed [Y] except before *ng* and *nk*, where it usually appears as [u], and before *gi*, where it is diphthongized as [Yi]. In stressed syllables, the vowel is short [Y] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [Y:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position). Furthermore, *u* can be the second element of the diphthong *au* which can also be either short [9i] or long [9i:] under the same conditions as monophthongs.

ú

The letter *ú* stands for a high front vowel which is transcribed [i]. In stressed syllables, the vowel is short [u] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [u:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position).

y

The letter *y* stands for the same sound as *i* – a high-mid front unrounded vowel. It is transcribed [I] except before *ng*, *nk* and *gi*, where it usually appears as [i]. In stressed syllables, the vowel is short [I] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [I:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position). Furthermore, *i* can be the second element of the diphthong *ei* which can also be either short [ei] or long [ei:] under the same conditions as monophthongs.

ý

The letter *ý* stands for the same sound as *í* – a high front unrounded vowel which is transcribed [i]. In stressed syllables, the vowel is short [i] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s + v/j/r*, but otherwise long [i:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position).

æ

The letter *æ* stands for a diphthong which is transcribed [ai]. In stressed syllables, the diphthong is short [ai] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s* + *v/j/r*, but otherwise long [ai:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position).

ö

The letter *ö* stands for a low-mid front rounded vowel. It is transcribed [9] except before *ng*, *nk* and *gi*, where it is diphthongized as [9i]. In stressed syllables, the vowel is short [9] before long consonants (geminate) and consonant clusters, except *p/t/k/s* + *v/j/r*, but otherwise long [9:] (before other vowels, single consonants, and in final position).

5 Simplification of Consonant Clusters

Since Icelandic is an inflectional language with a highly productive morphology, long consonant clusters often arise in word-internal and final position due to the concatenation of morphemes. In the spoken language, such consonant clusters are very often simplified by syncope, assimilation, or both. It is for instance common for the middle consonant in a cluster of three to be omitted. Care must be taken to distinguish among the processes of this kind that are completely natural, even in formal speech, and those that are mainly found in casual allegro speech.

Following is a non-exhaustive list of possible cluster simplifications – the most common ones are shown in Section 4. When only one transcription is shown, it may be considered the standard pronunciation of the cluster in question. Parentheses are put around sounds that may or may not be omitted, depending on register and speaker variation. No regional variants are shown here.

Cluster	Transcription	Example	Orthography
-áf	[au:(v)]	[k_hau:(v)a]	<i>káfa</i>
-ág	[au:(G)]	[mau:(G)Yr]	<i>mágur</i>
-óf	[ou:(v)]	[rou:(v)a]	<i>rófa</i>
-óg	[ou:(G)]	[pou:(G)Yr]	<i>bógur</i>
-úf	[u:(v)]	[lju:(v)Yr]	<i>ljúfur</i>
-úg	[u:(G)]	[plju:(G)Yr]	<i>bljúgur</i>
-fld	[(v)lt]	[E(v)ltI]	<i>efldi</i>
-flt	[l_0t]	[t_hEl_0t]	<i>teflt</i>
-fnd	[mt]	[hEmtI]	<i>hefndi</i>
-fns	[fs]/[pn_0s]	[r_0afs]/[r_0apn_0s]	<i>hrafns</i>
-fnt	[m_0t]	[jam_0t]	<i>jafnt</i>
-fts	[f(t)s]	[lOf(t)s]	<i>lofts</i>
-g(g)ld	[lt]	[sIlItI]	<i>sigldi</i>

-g(g)lt	[l_0t]	[sIl_0t]	<i>siglt</i>
-g(g)nd	[Nt]	[rINtI]	<i>rigndi</i>
-gns	[xs]/[kn_0s]	[kaxs]/[kakn_0s]	<i>gagns</i>
-g(g)nst	[Nst]	[scINst]	<i>skyggnst</i>
-g(g)nt	[N_0t]	[r_0IN_0t]	<i>hrygnt</i>
-gts	[x(t)s]	[c9x(t)s]	<i>gjögts</i>
-knt	[N_0t]	[siN_0t]	<i>sýknt</i>
-k(k)ts	[x(t)s]	[svEx(t)s]	<i>svekkts</i>
-l(l)ds	[l(t)s]	[Tvail(t)s]	<i>þvælds</i>
-lfd	[lt]	[k_hvOltI]	<i>hvolfdi</i>
-lfr	[l(v)r]	[il(v)ra]	<i>ýlfra</i>
-lfs	[l(f)s]	[ul(f)s]	<i>úlfs</i>
-lft	[l_0t]	[t_houl_0tI]	<i>tólfti</i>
-lgd	[lt]	[fIlItI]	<i>fylgdi</i>
-lgn	[ln]	[vOlna]	<i>volgna</i>
-lks	[ls]/[l_0ks]	[fouls]/[foul_0ks]	<i>fólks</i>
-lkt	[l_0t]	[vEl_0tYr]	<i>velktur</i>
-lps	[ls]/[l_0ps]	[k_hvOls]/[k_hvOl_0ps]	<i>hvolps</i>
-lsks	[ls(ks)]	[fals(ks)]	<i>falsks</i>
-lskt	[lst]	[p_houlst]	<i>pólskt</i>
-l(l)ts	[l_0(t)s]	[cIl_0(t)s]	<i>gyllts</i>
-mbd	[mt]	[rEmtIst]	<i>rembdist</i>
-mbs	[ms]	[lams]	<i>lambs</i>
-mbt	[m_0t]	[c_hEm_0t]	<i>kembt</i>
-m(m)ds	[m(t)s]	[lim(t)s]	<i>límds</i>
-mps	[ms]/[m_0ps]	[svams]/[svam_0ps]	<i>svamps</i>
-n(n)ds	[n(t)s]	[san(t)s]	<i>sands</i>
-ngd	[Nt]	[r_0iNtI]	<i>hringdi</i>
-ngds	[N(t)s]	[streiN(t)s]	<i>strengds</i>
-ngn	[(N)n]	[lu(N)na]	<i>lungna</i>
-ngs	[Ns]	[hauNs]	<i>hangs</i>
-ngt	[N_0t]	[t_heiN_0t]	<i>tengt</i>
-nks	[N_0(k)s]	[tiN_0(k)s]	<i>dynks</i>
-n(n)sks	[ns(ks)]	[frans(ks)]	<i>fransks</i>
-nkt	[n_0t]	[p_hun_0tYr]	<i>punktur</i>
-n(n)skt	[nst]	[fInst]	<i>finnskt</i>
-p(p)ts	[f(t)s]	[t_hEf(t)s]	<i>teppt</i>
-rðl	[rtl]	[spErtlar]	<i>sperðlar</i>
-rðn	[rtn]	[hartna]	<i>harðna</i>
-rfð	[rD]	[hOrDI]	<i>horfði</i>
-rfl	[rtl]	[k_hvartla]	<i>hvarfla</i>

<i>-rfn</i>	[rtn]	[hOrtnIr]	<i>horfnir</i>
<i>-rfs</i>	[r(f)s]	[Or(f)s]	<i>orfs</i>
<i>-rfst</i>	[(r_0)st]	[hO(r_0)st]	<i>horfst</i>
<i>-rft</i>	[r_0t]	[hOr_0t]	<i>horft</i>
<i>-rgð</i>	[rD]	[mErD]	<i>mergð</i>
<i>-rgn</i>	[rtn]	[mOrtna]	<i>morgna</i>
<i>-rgs</i>	[r(k)s]	[tvEr(k)s]	<i>dvergs</i>
<i>-rgt</i>	[r_0t]	[mar_0t]	<i>margt</i>
<i>-r(r)ks</i>	[r_0(k)s]	[stEr_0(k)s]	<i>sterks</i>
<i>-rkst</i>	[(r_0)st]	[stI(r_0)st]	<i>styrkst</i>
<i>-rkt</i>	[r_0t]	[mIr_0t]	<i>myrkt</i>
<i>-rkts</i>	[r_0(t)s]	[stIr_0(t)s]	<i>styrkts</i>
<i>-rls</i>	[((r)t)ls]	[k_ha((r)t)ls]	<i>karls</i>
<i>-rmd</i>	[(r)mt]	[TI(r)mtI]	<i>þyrmdi</i>
<i>-rms</i>	[(r)ms]	[ha(r)ms]	<i>harms</i>
<i>-rmt</i>	[(r_0)m_0t]	[hE(r_0)m_0t]	<i>hermt</i>
<i>-rnd</i>	[(r)nt]	[fI(r)ntYr]	<i>fyrndur</i>
<i>-rns</i>	[r_0s]	[par_0s]	<i>barns</i>
<i>-rnsk</i>	[(r)nsk]	[pE(r)nska]	<i>bernska</i>
<i>-rnt</i>	[n_0t]	[hIn_0t]	<i>hyrnt</i>
<i>-rps</i>	[r_0(p)s]	[TO_r_0(p)s]	<i>þorps</i>
<i>-rpst</i>	[(r_0)st]	[scE(r_0)st]	<i>skerpst</i>
<i>-rpt</i>	[r_0t]	[scIr_0tI]	<i>skyrpti</i>
<i>-rpts</i>	[r_0(t)s]	[scEr_0(t)s]	<i>skerpts</i>
<i>-rsk</i>	[(r_0)sk]	[nO(r_0)skYr]	<i>norskur</i>
<i>-rsk(i/e/æ/ei)</i>	[(r_0)sc]	[fja(r_0)scI]	<i>ffjarski</i>
<i>-rsks</i>	[r_0s]/[sks]	[TO_r_0s]/[TOsks]/[TOs:]	<i>þorsks</i>
<i>-rskt</i>	[(r_0)st]	[cE(r_0)st]	<i>gerskt</i>
<i>-rsl</i>	[(r_0)stI]	[spa(r_0)stIa]	<i>sparsla</i>
<i>-rsn</i>	[(r_0)stn]	[vE(r_0)stna]	<i>versna</i>
<i>-r(r)st</i>	[(r_0)st]	[pE(r_0)st]	<i>berst</i>
<i>-rst</i>	[s:]/[sts]	[fIs:]/[fIsts]	<i>fyrsts</i>
<i>-r(r)ts</i>	[r_0(t)s]	[svar_0(t)s]	<i>svarts</i>
<i>-sks</i>	[s:]/[sks]	[fIs:]/[fIsks]	<i>fisks</i>
<i>-skt</i>	[st]	[frist]	<i>frískt</i>
<i>-sps</i>	[s:]/[sps]	[ras:]/[rasps]	<i>rasps</i>
<i>-stk</i>	[sk]/[sc]	[sIsIn]	<i>systkin</i>
<i>-sts</i>	[s:]/[sts]	[p_hrEs]/[p_hrEsts]	<i>prests</i>
<i>-tns</i>	[s:]	[vas:]	<i>vatns</i>