The Ingush sound system

Below are tables showing the Ingush sounds in our all-Latin spelling, in the current spelling system (using the Russian orthography) in use in Ingushetia, and in phonetic transcription. Example words follow. This information is non-technical and is intended to be useful to non-linguists who know some Ingush as well as to the general public.

Ingush has a large and complex inventory of vowels as well as a large and complex inventory of consonants. Most of the vowels are fully independent from others only in some contexts, falling together with one or more others in other contexts. (A similar situation arises in American English, where the vowels of words such as *heat* and *hit*, or *seat* and *sit*, fall together before "r" as in *hear*, *mere, fear,* etc. Native speakers of English may disagree as to which of the two vowels they perceive in words such as *here*. This is not a disagreement on pronunciation, but on the theoretical identity of the vowel.)

Ingush vowels and diphthongs

Vowels and rising diphthongs:

ii		uu
i	y	u
ie		uo
(e)	a	o
ea	aa	oa

Falling diphthongs:

ej		
aj	oj	ov
aaj		aav

Spelling in current orthography:

ий		ув
и	и, а	у
е, э		о
е, э	а, е	о
аь	а	оа

ай		
ай	ой	ов
ай		ав

Phonetic transcription, using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). For the full IPA see http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/IPA/ipachart.html

i:		u:
ɪ	i‾	ʊ
i:ɛ		uo, u:ə, u:ʊ, wo:
ɛ	ʌ	o, ɔ
ɛæ:	a:	ɔa:

ej		
ʌj	oj, ᵘoj	ʌw
a:j		a:w

Below are English words whose vowels and diphthongs (in American pronunciation!) are similar to the Ingush ones in corresponding positions in the above charts. -- = no good analog in American English. ( ) = less good approximation, or one exploiting non-distinctive details of pronunciation next to particular consonants.

feed		food
mit	(mit)	put
--		(pool)
met	mutt	caught *
can	rod *	(fog) *

rate		
(write)	boy	(know) **
ride		now

* Assuming a dialect where *cot* and *caught* are pronounced differently. In dialects of American English where they are identical, the vowels of the asterisked words are usually closest to what we show as *rod* here.

** A closer match is *house*, in Canadian pronunciation.

Ingush consonants

p	t	c	ch	kj	k	q	’	w
	tt				kk	qq		
p'	t'	c'	ch'	kj’	k'	q'		
	tt’							
b	d	dz	dzh	gj	g			
f		s	sh		x		h	hw
		ss						
v		z	zh			gh		
m		n						
		rh						
	l	r						
	ll							
			j					

п	т	ц	ч	к	к	кх	*, ъ	I
	тт			кк	кк	ккх		
пI	тI	цI	чI	кI	кI	къ		
	ттI							
б	д	з	ж	г				
ф		с	ш		х		хI	хь
		сс						
в		з	ж			гI		
м		н						
		рхI						
	л	р						
	лл							
			й, **					

* not written
** also the “soft” vowel letters е я ю

Phonetic transcription or description of selected consonants, using standard notation followed by IPA if that is different:

c	[ts]	tt, kk, etc.	double (geminate)
ch	[č], IPA [tʃ]	p’, t’, etc.	ejectives
sh	[š], IPA [ʃ]	rh	voiceless rhotic

’	[ʔ]	(glottal stop)
w	[ʕ]	pharyngeal; also pharyngealization (syllabic feature)
hw	[ħ]	voiceless pharyngeal

(Most if not all consonants can be geminated by various morphophonemic processes. The geminates shown here are only those that occur in root morphemes.)

Example words, in our spelling and current orthography. Phonetic transcription is sometimes also included. Different possible spellings are indicated with a slash. Where there are automatic vowel length alternations within inflectional paradigms, both a phonemic spelling and a more abstract one are given. For example:

	phonemic	abstract	phonetic	meaning
nominative singular	kor	kuor	[kor]	window
plural	kuorazh	kuorazh	[kuorəž]	windows

Here the abstract spelling reflects the fact that the vowel was originally /uo/ but it has been shortened where the syllable is closed.

In Ingush the stress is always on the first syllable, and short vowels of all later syllables are reduced to a vowel much like the second one in English *sofa*. In many contexts they are reduced to near inaudibility. These are phonetically transcribed [ə] and (for the super-reduced variant) [ᵊ].

Words illustrating the various Ingush vowels:

sii	'honor'	сий
zhwalii	'dog'	жIалий
iis	'nine'	ийс
biisa [bi:sᵊ]	'night'	бийса
c'i	'name', 'fire'	цIи
bwi	'nest'	бIи
itt	'10'	итт
ciskj	'cat'	цискъ
dika	'good'	дика
istuol	'table'	истол
hwie	'yourself' (2sg refl.)	хьо
dearie	'silk (fabric)'	даьре
bier	'child'	бер
biett, diett	'beat(s)' (B, D genders)	бетт, детт
bierazh	'children'	бераш
hwiexarxuo	'teacher'	хьехархо
jett	'cow'	етт
pwed	'frog'	пхьед, пхьид
ezar	'1000'	эзар
mela	'warm'	мела
jaxar [jexər]	'(she) went'	йахар
wedzh	'handle'	Iерж
wazh	'apple'	Iаж
meca	'hungry'	меца
maca	'when'	маца

dea	‘done’ (D gender)	даь
meaq	‘bread’	маькх
beaccara	‘green’	баьццара
meachiezh	‘shoes’	маьчеш
d•y	‘is’ (D gender)	да
sy	‘my’	са
fy	‘what’	фу
yz	‘s/he, it’	из
cy xovzh	‘not knowing’	ца ховш
t’y-juux	‘puts on (garment)’	тIаювх
cha	‘bear’	ча
bat	‘face’	бат
mala	‘who’	мала
sahwat	‘hour’	сахьат
vaxar	‘he went’	вахар
nuu	‘broom’	нув
ghuu	‘well’ (noun)	гIув
buruu *	‘drill bit, auger’	бурув
doshuu *	‘gold’	дошув
duuc	‘tells, narrates’	дувц
duuca	‘tell, narrate’ (infinitive)	дувца

* For some speakers the final vowel in these words is not /uu/ but /uo/.

fu	‘breed, line; seed’	фу
dulx	‘meat’	дулх
buc	‘grass’	буц
fu’	‘egg’	фуъ
burgac	‘ball’	бургац
fusam	‘household, host’s home’	фусам
duqa	‘much, many’	дукха
muo	‘like’; ‘bad’	мо
fuo	‘air’	фо
kor / kuor	‘window’	кор
kuorazh	‘windows’	кораш
kuorta	‘head’	корта
so	‘I’	со
dogh / dogha	‘rain’	догIа
dom	‘dust’	дом
molazh	‘drinking’ (converb)	молаш
chopalgj	‘button’	чопилг

doa	‘wicker’	доа
boardz	‘gravemound’	боарз
doagha	‘comes’ (D gender)	доагӀа
dwoagha	‘key’	дӀоагӀа
qoana	‘tomorrow’	кхоана
daa	‘father’	да
laatt	‘stands’ (present tense)	латт
daac	‘isn’t’ (D gender)	дац
maalx	‘sun’	малх
daacar	‘wasn’t’ (D gender)	дацар

Diphthongs, beginning with some minimal differences:

sej	‘deer’	сай
ghejba	‘pillow’	гӀайба
tejpa	‘clan’	тайпа
vaj	‘we’ (include.)	вай
laj	‘slave, servant’	лай
cwajtt	‘11’	цхьайтта
Wajshiet [ʕajšet]	‘Aisha’	Іайшет
vajna	‘we (incl.) (dative case)’	вайна
vejna	‘having seen him’	вейна
laj	‘servant’	лай
lej	‘snow’ (genitive case)	лай
Wajshiet	‘Aisha’	Іайшет
wejshaa	‘chewed’ (< wovsh ‘chew’)	Іейша
ghalghaaj	‘Ingush’ (gen. pl.)	гӀалгӀай
loalaxoj / loalaxuoj	‘neighbors’	лоалахой
wov [ʕow]	‘accumulates, builds up’	Іов
vaxaa-v	‘(he) went, has gone’	

A few examples illustrating the effects of a reduced vowel at the end of a word (compared to otherwise identical words with no such final vowel):

vuozha	[vuožᵊ]	‘fall’ (imperative, infinitive; V gender)	вожа
vuozh / vodzh	[voǯː]	‘(he) falls’ (present)	вож
vuozh / vozh	[vož]	‘other, the other’	вож
jaaxa	[jaːxᵊ]	‘live’ (imperative, infinitive; J gender)	яха
jaax	[jaxː]	‘(she) lives’ (present)	ях

lata	[lʌtˤ]	‘fight; adhere’ (imperative, infinitive)	лата
lat	[lʌtː]	‘fights; adheres’ (present)	лат

Words illustrating some of the Ingush consonants. Palatovelars (and their effects on adjacent vowels):

ciskjazh	[cisʲkʲiž]	‘cats’	цискаш
hwazalgjazh	[hwazilʲgʲiž]	‘birds’	хьазилгаш
mottig / mottagj	[mottigʲ]	‘place’	моттиг
burtig / burtagj	[burtigʲ]	‘kernel’	буртиг
darrig /darragj	[dʌrigʲ] / [derigʲ]	‘all’	дерриг

Pharyngeals:

wam	[ʕam]	‘lake, pond’	Iам
weadal	[ʕæːdəl]	‘custom; power’	Iаьдал
wiirie	[ʕiːrie], [ʕijrie]	‘morning’	Iуйре
wedzh	[ʕeǯ]	‘handle’	Iерж
caw	[caʕ]	‘one’	цаI
niw	[nɪʕ]	‘door’	ниI
jiwig	[jɪʕɪgʲ]	‘girl’	йиIиг
muwa	[mʊʕˤ]	‘horn’	муIа
hwo	[ħo]	‘you’ (singular)	хьо
hweasha	[ħæːšˤ]	‘guest’	хьаьша
cigahw	[cɪgʲəħ]	‘here’	цигахь
muhw	[mʊħ]	‘lard, animal fat’	мухь
sahwat	[sʌħˤt]	‘hour’	сахьат
bahwan	[bʌħən]	‘reason’	бахьан

Pharyngealization:

daa	[daːˤ]	‘father’	да
dwaa	[dʕaːˤ]	‘there’	дIа