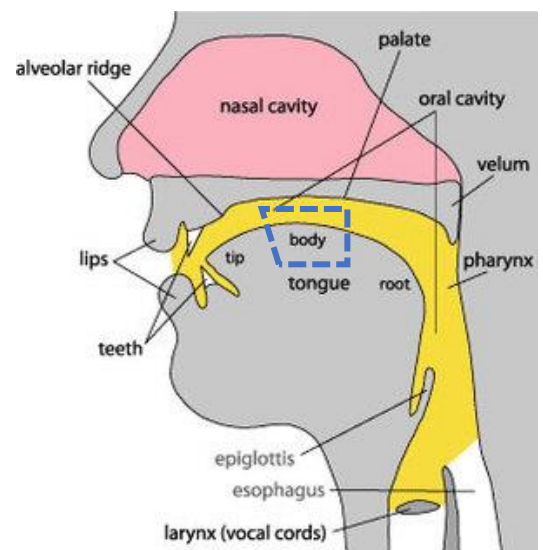
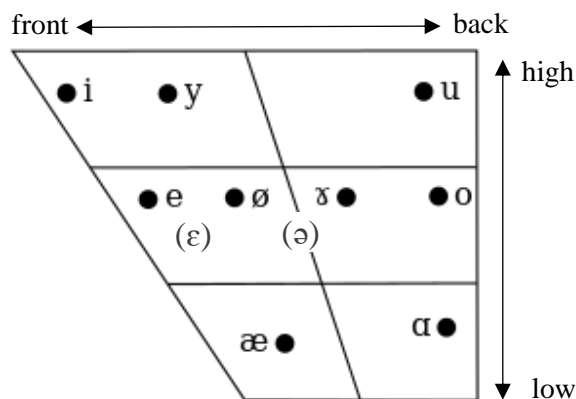


Estonian: A Pronunciation Guide

| Written Estonian | IPA | Description/Example |
|---|-----|--|
| <i> | [i] | Same as written <i> in most Indo-European languages, e.g. Spanish ‘s <u>i</u> ’. |
| <ü> | [y] | Same as written <ü> or <y> in most Germanic languages; [i] with rounded lips. |
| <u> | [u] | Same as written <u> in most Indo-European languages, e.g. Spanish ‘t <u>u</u> ’; farther back in the mouth for Estonian than in English (rounding the lips helps bring the tongue back for this particular sound). |
| <e> | [e] | Same as written <e> in most Indo-European languages, e.g. Spanish ‘m <u>e</u> ’; higher in the mouth than English [ɛ] (e.g. ‘b <u>e</u> d’); think English diphthong [eɪ] (e.g. ‘h <u>e</u> y’) without the off-glide vowel. |
| <ö> | [ø] | Same as written <ö> in most Germanic languages; [e] with rounded lips (does not occur in this text). |
| <õ> | [ɤ] | Similar to schwa (‘uh’), but with the body of the tongue slightly farther back and closer to the roof of the mouth; try gently curling the tongue back on an [ə]. |
| <o> | [o] | Same as written <o> in most Indo-European languages, e.g. Spanish ‘y <u>o</u> ’; think English diphthong [oo] without the off-glide vowel. Rounding the lips helps draw this vowel back for its placement in Estonian. |
| <ä> | [æ] | Same as in English ‘c <u>a</u> t’; an open, low, front vowel. |
| <a> | [ɑ] | Same as in English ‘f <u>a</u> ther’; an open, low, back vowel. |
| Long vowels and (over-)long consonants are indicated by doubled letters (e.g. ‘toon’ = [to:n]). | | |
| The second vowel in a diphthong is typically non-syllabic (i.e. uttered at the very last moment, e.g. [ei]). | | |
| Word-final unstressed <e> typically lowers to [ɛ], which is very close to English [ɛ]. | | |
| The <õ> in <õnn> and <Õnnistegija> diphthongizes to [ɤi] by virtue of occurring before a nasal consonant. [i] is similar to schwa, but is made with the body of the tongue closer to the roof of the mouth. | | |
| The only plosive consonants in Estonian are [p], [t], and [k], which are all unaspirated (think English ‘map <u>l</u> e’ ‘man <u>t</u> le’ and ‘an <u>k</u> le’, versus ‘p <u>e</u> a’, ‘t <u>e</u> a’, and ‘k <u>e</u> y’). There is no real differentiation between the sounds [b] and [p], [d] and [t], or [g] and [k] in Estonian. In the orthography, , <d>, and <g> only represent shortened versions of the sounds [p], [t], and [k]. | | |
| Primary word stress in Estonian generally occurs on the first syllable (consistently so in this text). | | |

Estonian vowel inventory (some English vowels parenthesized in grey for reference)



This is the vowel chart (above) that we use in linguistics; it is superimposed onto the human vocal tract (right) for reference.

Estonian consonant inventory (palatalized consonants shown in grey; not so important for this text)

| | BILABIAL | LABIODENT | ALVEOL | POSTALV | PALATAL | VELAR | GLOTTAL |
|-----------|----------|-----------|--------|----------|---------|-------|---------|
| PLOSIVE | p | | t | | tʲ | k | |
| NASAL | m | | n | | nʲ | | |
| TRILL | | | r | | | | |
| FRICATIVE | | f v | s | ʃ ('sh') | sʲ | | h |
| LATERAL | | | l | | lʲ | | |
| APPROXIM | | | | | j | | |

Text-to-IPA Transcription

Here is an IPA transcription of the song text if you want to try reading along with the recording :)

Estonian

Ma tulen taevast ülevalt,
häid sõnumeid toon teile säält,
neid toon ma teile rõõmuga,
neid tahan mina kuuluta.

Üks laps on täna sündinud,
kui ammust ajast töötud.
See kaunis, ilus lapsuke
on teie rõõm ja kallid õnn.

See on see Issand Jeesus Krist,
kes tahab aita hädalist;
see on see Õnnistegija,
kes teid võib patust lunasta.

IPA

ma tu.len tae.vast y.le.velt
hæit sɤ.nu.meit to:n tei.lɛ sæ:lt
nei:t to:n ma tei.lɛ rø:.mu.ka
nei:t ta.han mi.na ku:.lut.ta

yks laps on tæ.na syn.ti.nut
kui am.must a.jast tɤ.ot.tut
se: kau.nis i.lus lap.suk.kɛ
on tei.ɛ rø:m ja kal.lis ɤ:n:

se: on se: is.sand je:.sus krist
kes ta.hab ait.ta hæ.ta.list
se: on se: ɤ:n.nis.te.ki.ja
kes teit vɤip pat.tust lu.nas.ta

Sources/Special Thanks:

Asu, E.L. (2009). Estonian. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association: Illustrations of the IPA*, 39(3), 367-372. doi:10.1017/S002510030999017X.

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