IsiXhosa – Basic Pronunciation Guide

Pronunciation of vowels

- a in umbrella
- u in umbrella
- i in keep
- e in empty
- o in more

- amanzi (water)
- umakhulu (grandmother)
- ewe (yes)
- idolo (knee)

Pronunciation of consonants

Single consonants are easy and pronounced in the same way as English consonants

- e.g. h in hand
- j in jump

- hamba (go)
- jika (turn)

Pronunciation of clicks

Xhosa has three basic clicks:

- The dental click c (this sounds similar to the English sound of irritation, “tsk, tsk”.
  The tip of the tongue is placed behind the front two teeth and then sucked away.)

- The palatal click q (this is a similar sound to that of a cork being drawn from a bottle. The front of the tongue is pushed against the roof of the mouth and drawn sharply downwards.)

- The lateral click x (this similar to the sound one makes when encouraging a horse to move.
  The tongue is placed against the roof of the mouth then drawn sharply away from the teeth at the side of the mouth, keeping contact between the palate and the tip of the tongue.)

Aspirated consonants

For aspirated consonants, you exhale on the h.

- bh bhalal (write)
- ph phakathi (inside) NB: ph is not pronounced ‘f’ as in English
- th thula (be quiet) NB: th is not pronounced as in English think
- kh khwela (get on/ride)

Useful video clip

Introduction to isiXhosa Pronunciation by Pinnock Consulting on Youtube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CCHSOkqDKdl