

Use of phonemic transcription as a teaching method in Finnish schools

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1. Introduction

Phonemic transcription is a familiar sight to every student who has studied English as a foreign language. It is used in many schoolbook series to teach the pronunciation of new words added into the students' vocabulary. It is considered, by Lintunen (2004) among many others, extremely effective for Finnish learners of English in particular, as it serves as a medium between text and speech, and because these two languages are almost opposites in terms of letter-to-sound correspondence. However, recent studies have suggested that the teaching of phonemic symbols, along with pronunciation teaching in general, does not reach its full potential in Finnish classrooms. Although phonemic transcription is just one of many pronunciation teaching methods available, it seems that the overall negligence of pronunciation teaching has caused it to become rather irregular and disorderly.

The purpose of this study is to determine what kind of experiences of phonemic transcription Finnish upper secondary school graduates have. The study was conducted using a questionnaire (Appendix 1) that includes not only questions considering the use of phonemic transcription in English teaching, but also small exercises to determine the level of the respondents' transcription skills. The questionnaire also has an open question in the end to help the author understand the results better and to gain data that cannot be obtained using only simple multiple choice questions.

Following research questions will be answered:

1. Has phonemic transcription been taught to Finnish upper secondary school graduates?
2. How well can Finnish upper secondary school graduates read phonemic transcription?
3. What kind of experiences of phonemic transcription in English teaching do Finnish upper secondary school graduates have?

The motivation behind this study is the author's interest in pronunciation teaching, which he thinks is insufficient in Finnish schools. Phonemic transcription was chosen as the teaching method under closer inspection due to the fact that the author himself found it extremely beneficial for improving his own pronunciation, and as he wanted to acquire objective data to back his personal experiences.

2. Theoretical background

In this section phonemic transcription and its use as a teaching method will be shortly introduced.

2.1 Phonemic transcription

Phonology is the study of sound systems in different languages. Different units of sounds, phonemes, are most commonly transcribed in English using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), that consists of alphabetic symbols (such as /a/ and /ŋ/) and non-alphabetic symbols (such as /:/ and /'/) that are used to describe sounds and other aspects of sounds such as length and intonation. The reason why the use of phonetic alphabet is very important in the study of pronunciation is the fact that graphemes we use in writing are not sufficient or versatile enough to cover all required aspects of speech. The IPA was founded as early as in 1886 by English and French language teachers, and as the study of speech and phonetics has progressed, the amount of symbols required to express speech and sounds of different languages has also increased (Morris-Wilson 2004).

According to IPA Handbook, the IPA Alphabet can be used as a way to: “show pronunciation in a dictionary, to record a language in linguistic fieldwork, to form the basis of a writing system for a language, or to annotate acoustic and other displays in the analysis of speech” (IPA Handbook, 1999, p. 3), and for these purposes a generally agreed set of symbols is required. Although the IPA Alphabet fulfills this role, there is a lot of variation in the use of these symbols, as the scientific communities from different countries prefer the use of symbols that represent the sounds in their own language instead of IPA symbols, for example the use of ş or š instead of /ʃ/ (Wells, 2005, p. 2).

Transcription is the linear use of phonetic symbols. Like in the case of IPA Alphabet, there is a great deal of variation in the use of transcription as well. Phonetic transcription is “an umbrella term that is used to refer to several types of transcription” (Lintunen, 2004, p. 27), and often used interchangeably with other terms that refer to transcription. Phonetic transcription is also often used when referring to phonemic transcription, and although the terms are used interchangeably, the two types of transcription are actually quite different. Phonetic transcription tries to capture not only the phonological differences in sounds, but also the differences in the phonetic quality of the sounds, such as the aspiration of /t/ or

the velarization of /l/. Phonemic transcription however, according to the IPA Handbook, “notes only phonological contrasts” (IPA Handbook, 1999, p. 160), and only aims to separate one phoneme from another. Purely phonemic transcription is also often referred to as “broad transcription” (and phonetic transcription naturally “narrow transcription”), although broad transcription may also refer to phonemic transcription that uses the roman alphabet as often as possible, replacing the IPA vowel symbols (for example /ɪ/ and /ʊ/) with the roman alternatives (/i/ and /u/) (IPA Handbook 1999, p. 28-29). The two different types of transcription can easily be distinguished from each other, as the IPA Handbook recommends that phonetic transcription should be enclosed in square brackets [], and phonemic transcription in slanted lines or slashes / / (p. 160).

When transcription is used in school textbooks and dictionaries, phonemic transcription is often used due to its simplicity, and in order to reach a somewhat canonical pronunciation and transcription for the words (Lintunen, 2004, p. 30). Several different types of phonemic transcription exist, and there does not seem to be a standard version, as different authors argue for the usefulness of each system over another. According to Morris-Wilson (2004, p. 4-5), the system of Daniel Jones seems to be the most widely used form of transcription among Finnish publishers of school textbooks. Morris-Wilson himself argues for the use of the Cruttenden system, which is also used by the most authoritative pronouncing dictionaries of British English, such as *The Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation of Current English* (2001). Morris-Wilson finds the Cruttenden system particularly suitable for Finnish students, as it has been strongly influenced by the Finnish vowel system, and manages to capture the differences in vowel length and quality much better than the prevalent Daniel Jones system.

2.2 Connection between transcription and pronunciation

The connection between students’ transcription skills and pronunciation has not been thoroughly researched, although some research concerning this subject has been made. One of these experiments was conducted by Šuštaršič in 1997 (mentioned in Lintunen, 2004, p.37) as he studied the pronunciation and transcription errors made by Slovene students of English. Šuštaršič had a group of students transcribe a written text, and after a week the students were asked to transcribe the same text again, but this time with the help of an audio recording of the text. The students made less errors when

transcribing with the help of the audio recording, as weak forms and stress patterns were easier to identify. However, the majority of errors made in the transcriptions were identical to those made in pronunciation, and often also those made by Slovene speakers of English, meaning there is definitely a connection between pronunciation and productive transcriptions.

Finding and confirming the connection between transcription skills and pronunciation was also one of the main goals in research conducted by Lintunen (2004). In his experiment, he taught his students both pronunciation and phonemic transcription simultaneously. Both pronunciation and transcription skills were tested three times in three months in an attempt to find a connection between the improvement of these two skills among university students. The subjects' performances in pronunciation and transcription tests correlated both qualitatively and quantitatively. Although it is impossible to say that transcription in particular had a great impact on the subjects' increase in pronunciation skills, it was noted that those who mastered transcription best also showed the greatest improvement in their pronunciation, and those who lacked transcription skills showed little to none improvement in pronunciation. In addition to this, a questionnaire was also sent to the students, enquiring if the students felt that the teaching of the phonemic script had improved their pronunciation. Out of 111 respondents, 82% overall believed that transcription had improved their pronunciation. 28% of the students were very positive towards the phonemic script, feeling that learning transcription had greatly increased the quality of their pronunciation. 4.5% of the students said that the phonemic script had no effect on their pronunciation, but all those students except one also felt that their pronunciation skills had not improved during the first year of their studies (p. 186). Although the results seem very positive, it should be noted that the experiment was conducted on first year university students, and it is unlikely that these results could be replicated with younger and less enthusiastic learners of English.

2.3 Benefits of learning phonemic transcription

Learning phonemic transcription is considered to be particularly useful for Finnish students studying a language with weak letter-to-phoneme correspondence and ambiguous spelling such as English (Tergujeff 2012a), due to Finns being accustomed to the high letter-to-phoneme correspondence in their first language (Suomi et al. 2008), a principle that phonemic transcription also relies on. As these

languages contrast each other in terms of division between speech and writing, phonemic transcription that lies between the two can be used help speakers understand the connection between spoken and written language (Lintunen 2004). Although the high letter-to-phoneme correspondence in Finnish allows speakers to understand phonemic transcription better, it's also the source of many pronunciation difficulties, as the spelling of the word often draws the reader's attention away from the actual pronunciation of the word (Morris-Wilson 2009, p. 5).

Although various "reading rules" exist in English as well, it is necessary to learn the pronunciation of many words individually, as these rules are often complicated and many exceptions occur. Some spellings are also entirely ambiguous, such as homographic words (such as bass, live, wound) and many verb-noun and verb-adjective pairs (such as conduct, digest, object), and the intonation and vowel quality of these words cannot be determined without context. This is why the skill of reading phonemic symbols is essential when learning new words from dictionaries (Wells, 1996).

Learning phonemic transcription mainly increases learners' phonemic awareness and the accuracy of their speech, but it can also be used to teach suprasegmental features such as linking sounds and weak and strong forms of words (Lintunen 2004, p.36) that are vital when moving from accented speech into more fluent, naturally flowing pronunciation of English (Morris-Wilson 2009, p. 3). When strong and weak forms of words are considered, only the pronunciation of the strong forms are taught as words are taken out of context, and the weaker forms are hardly used at all (Morris-Wilson 2009, p. 3). One way of teaching the use of strong and weak versions would be reading aloud phonemic transcriptions, a method that Gerhard (1964, mentioned in Lintunen 2004, p. 35) considers the most effective method for improving students' pronunciation.

Phonemic transcription is also important when acquiring foreign language pronunciation as it gives a point of reference for the learner. Iivonen (1998, p. 19) states that without phonetic understanding (that can be improved using transcription) the hearer might not be able to recognize all the phonetic features of foreign language speech. He also states that learning of a sound requires the creation of a memory model, which the speaker then uses to produce the sound. If the memory model is created with insufficient accuracy, the first language of the speaker interferes, creating a foreign accent. Being accustomed to the phonetic system of their mother tongue, people often do not hear foreign languages

spoken as they are but through the sounds of their first language, unable to notice the distinction between the two entirely different sound systems (Morris-Wilson 2004, p. 3). Incorrect perception of sounds is the cause of many pronunciation difficulties, and phonemic transcription is a good method of analytically perceiving and correcting the mistakes received imperfectly by ear (Lintunen 2004, p. 35). Phonemic transcription also serves as a point of reference between teachers and pupils, as it is impossible to refer to specific sounds such as schwa without transcription. It also allows pronunciation teaching to move away from traditional teacher-centric teaching and towards a more independent way of learning pronunciation.

2.4 Use of transcription as a teaching method in Finland

Although learning phonemic transcription is considered extremely beneficial for Finnish students of English, as mentioned previously in section 2.3, a study by Lintunen (2004) has shown that phonemic transcription is rarely, if at all, taught to students in Finnish schools. In a survey conducted by him, as many as 76,9% of the respondents stated that phonemic symbols had not been taught to them before university-level teaching. Only 14,8% believed that some symbols had been taught, and 5,6% had been taught to read all the symbols before entering university.

This is surprising, considering that most dictionaries and modern EFL textbooks use phonetic transcription when a new word is introduced into the students' vocabulary. Tergujeff (2010) studied the amount of pronunciation related exercises in 16 EFL text books by two major Finnish publishers (WSOY and Otava), and noticed that the books used IPA alphabet extensively, with transcribed versions of each new word offered in the vocabulary section of the book, and the IPA symbols described shortly in the back of each textbook. In addition to this, 33% of all pronunciation-specific tasks included consisted of phonetic training of some sort. Transcription exercises were also included, most of them being deciphering tasks, which required the student to read the phonemic script.

Phonemic transcription or phonetics are not referred to in the current Finnish core curriculum for basic education from 2004, and pronunciation in general is mentioned very briefly, as the objectives of oral skills seem to focus on communicative competence. (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004).

Learning objectives for EFL learning are based on the objectives set by the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference, which state that after upper secondary school (equivalent of English level B2) the learners should have acquired “a clear, natural, pronunciation and intonation” (Common European Framework of Reference, 2001). This vague expression can, according to Lintunen (2004, p. 4), be understood by referring to the learning objectives set for B1 English students (9th grade), which state that the learners’ “pronunciation is clearly intelligible even if a foreign accent is sometimes evident and occasional mispronunciations occur” (Common European Framework of Reference, 2001). According to Lintunen (2004), this would mean that upper secondary school graduates should have no traces of foreign accent at all, and not even occasional mispronunciations should occur (p. 4). This could only be achieved through extensive training of phonetics and intonation, two skills that could be improved by using phonemic transcription as a teaching method.

The lack of instructions given to teachers considering teaching phonetics and pronunciation related material allows teachers to choose their teaching method and material rather freely, as demonstrated in the next two paragraphs. According to a survey sent to 103 EFL teachers (Tergujeff 2012c), 95,6% reported to having taught their students to recognize all or some of the phonetic symbols (although the study mentioned before reported that 76,9% of the students had not learned them at school), and 22,8% reported to having taught the students to write the symbols as well. The teachers’ opinion towards the use of phonemic transcription were rather conflicting: some were extremely positive and regarded it an essential skill, whereas others saw it as an extra burden. In particular, those teachers working at the primary level thought that learning to write phonetic symbols was not a useful activity, as their focus was entirely on reading and understanding transcription. Some teachers and students were cautious towards the detrimental effect transcription might have on spelling, as they thought an alternative method of spelling might confuse the students. However, a study by Dufva and Vauras (2002) found that training of phonology and phonemic symbols of English increased the spelling and literacy of students struggling with the language. Training in transcription also increased the students’ word-recognition skills and greatly decreased their reading time.

Although the phonetic symbols might appear challenging at first, in a survey done by Lintunen (2004), 76,3% students said that all the symbols were easy to understand and learn. In addition to this, 20,3% said that some of the symbols were easy to understand, whereas only 2,6% of the respondents claimed

that most of the symbols were difficult to understand (p. 187). However, it is worth mentioning that the study was conducted on first year university students of English, and the results might vary greatly if the same study was conducted on younger learners who do not share the same initial level of English knowledge and the same motivation towards learning the language.

Another study by Tergujeff (2012c) observed the use of phonemic transcription in Finnish classrooms. Tergujeff observed EFL lessons of four different teachers (32 lessons in total) and studied their methods of teaching pronunciation-related activities. Methods of teaching varied greatly between the four teachers, especially when phonemic transcription was considered, as 7 of the 9 phonemic script related activities (out of 111 total activities) occurred during the lessons of one single teacher (upper secondary school). The 2 other activities occurred during the lessons of another teacher (primary school), who only referred to the phonemic transcription when demonstrating different sounds, and the script itself was not actively used. The two remaining teachers neither used nor referred to transcription at all.

One of the reasons why phonemic transcription is not taught sufficiently at school is the fact that pronunciation teaching altogether is often neglected in favour of other areas of English. Pronunciation teaching also suffers from the fact that it is very time consuming compared to other areas, and teachers would dedicate more time into pronunciation teaching if they could (Tergujeff, 2012b). Analyzing and evaluating the students' pronunciation in search of individual pronunciation mistakes is extremely time-consuming. Use of phonemic transcription exercises would allow teachers to evaluate pronunciation mistakes the same way grammar and spelling are evaluated.

3. Data and materials

The data collection for this thesis was conducted using a questionnaire (Appendix 1). Using a questionnaire was seen as the best method to gather a sufficient amount of data in a reasonably short time frame. The questionnaire was hosted in Google Forms and distributed electronically via e-mail and several social media platforms. Overall, 53 questionnaires were collected.

The questionnaire consisted of four different sections. The first section inquired the respondents' previous experiences with phonemic transcription. The first section consisted of five different questions. The first question asked the respondents the amount of transcription symbols they had been taught in schools. The following questions inquired at what level the teaching had happened, and if the respondents had been taught to write phonemic transcription as well. The two last questions in the first section asked whether the students felt they had received sufficient amount of teaching in transcription and in pronunciation in general. Section number two inquired which symbols had been taught to the respondents. The list consisted of all IPA symbols used in English language that are exclusive to the IPA Alphabet, and do not appear in the roman alphabet. Section number three consisted of six small transcription exercises that required the respondents to choose the correct transcription for a given word out of four different options (first three questions) and the correct word for a given transcription out of four different options (last three questions). The focus of these exercises were fricatives / f v θ ð s z ʃ ʒ / and affricates / tʃ dʒ / that are considered the most problematic sounds for Finnish students of English according to Morris-Wilson (2009). The fourth and final section consisted of an open question where respondents were asked to shortly in their own words describe their experiences of phonemic transcription in English teaching.

The respondents of this questionnaire were Finnish upper secondary school graduates that had graduated from a Finnish-speaking upper secondary school between 2010-2015. Only those who had graduated during the past five years were permitted to take part in the survey to ensure that the data is up-to-date and in hope that the respondents would not have forgotten the teaching they have received. In order to obtain appropriate data, those who had studied phonetics in any form (language studies, logopedics, etc.) were not permitted to participate in the study, as the data received from them would not have represented the skills of an average upper secondary school graduate.

The questionnaire was written in Finnish to ensure that all respondents have understood the questions correctly, and so that those with lower levels of English knowledge would not be uncertain of their skills and be too afraid to participate. In order to motivate the respondents to finish the questionnaire, all the questions (apart from the final question, which was an open question) were multiple choice questions, reducing the amount of time required to complete the questionnaire, and reducing blank answers from those uncertain of their transcription skills. Although multiple choice questions might

allow respondents to guess the correct answer without any actual knowledge, open answers in the section measuring the respondents' transcription level would have been too challenging. It also would have brought some technical difficulties, as transcription symbols would have been hard to write in Google Forms.

4. Results and analysis

In this section the results of the questionnaire will be introduced and analyzed.

4.1. Multiple choice questions

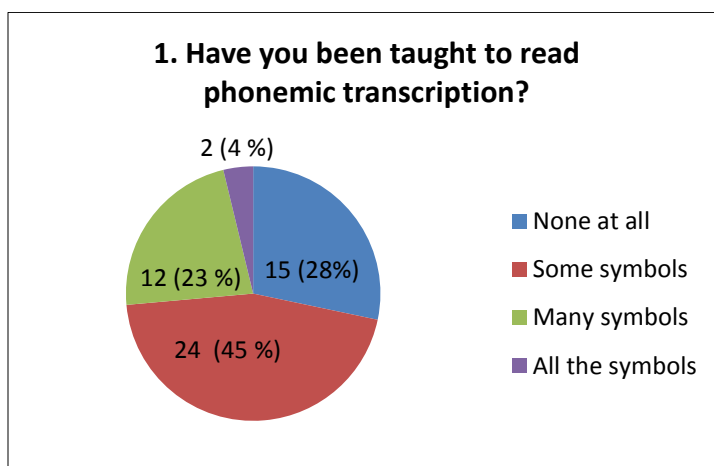


Table 1. The results of question number 1

The majority of the respondents (45%) reported that they had been taught to read some phonetic symbols at school. The next biggest group of respondents (28%) were those who said that reading phonemic transcription had not been taught to them at all. 23% of respondents reported that they had been taught many phonetic symbols, and only as little as 4% of respondents reported that they had been taught to read all required phonetic symbols. The results can also be seen above in Table 1.

The results of table 1 can be more thoroughly understood with the help of the rest of the questions, which will be introduced later in this chapter. Although the majority respondents reported that they had

been taught to read some symbols, many chose it because it was the safest option to choose. Especially those who were uncertain of the teaching they had received and those who had been instructed in the use of phonetic symbols once or twice during their studies chose this option. As multiple choice questions often are, question 1 was also limited, as respondents might have had different opinions on what counts as teaching. If the students have been taught to read several symbols, or if the teacher has referred to several phonemic symbols on one or two occasions during 10 years of studies, can it really be counted as teaching? The respondents might also have had different interpretations of “some” and “many”, especially if they have been taught a different number of symbols due to different transcription systems. Luckily both problems caused by the multiple choice question can be better inspected with the help of questions 6 and 10.

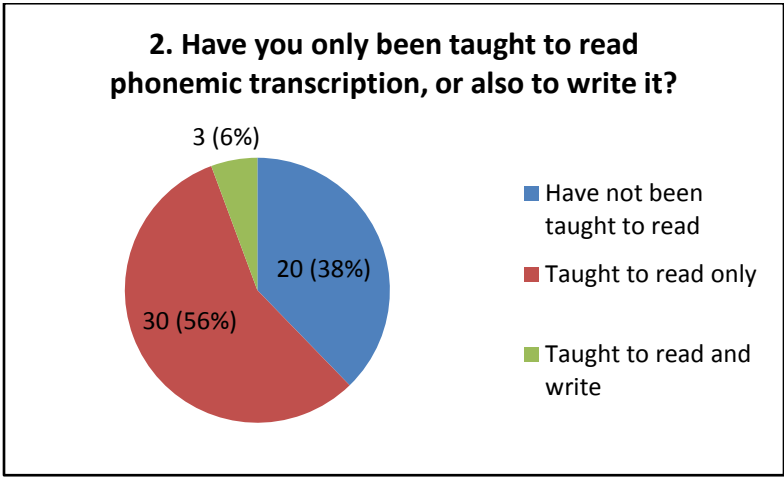


Table 2. The results of question number 2.

In question 2 the respondents were asked if they had been taught to read transcription, or also write it as well. The majority of the respondents (30%) stated that they had been taught only to read transcription. 20% reported that they been taught to neither read nor write transcription. Only 3 respondents (6%) stated that they had been taught to write phonemic transcription as well. The results of question 2 are illustrated above in Table 2.

Although previous research suggested that as many as 22,8% of English teachers have taught their students to write transcription (as can be seen in section 2.4, page 8), only 3 respondents (6%) reported to having been instructed in writing phonemic transcriptions. The amount of respondents who stated

that they had not been taught to read phonemic transcriptions at all was somewhat higher than in the previous question, but this can most likely be explained by the fact that many who were uncertain if the teaching they had received can really be defined as being taught to read phonemic transcription decided that being taught some symbols is not sufficient enough to count as being taught to read transcription.

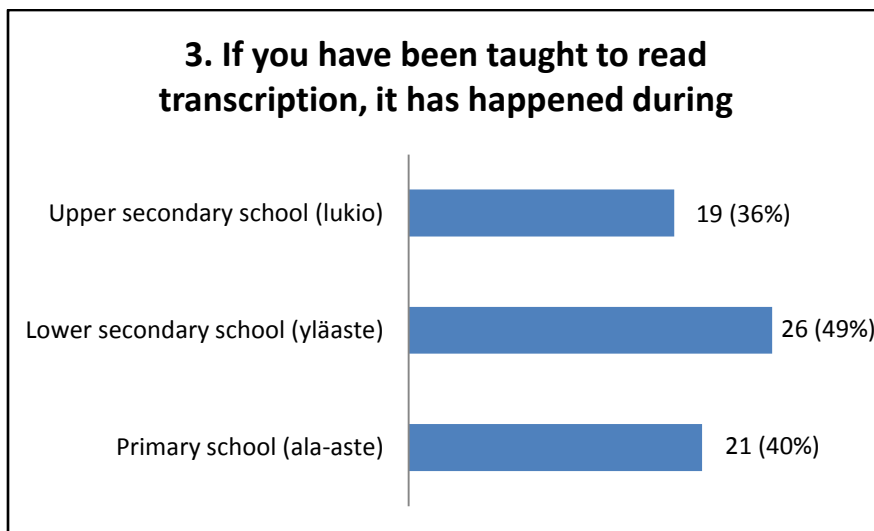


Table 3. The results of question number 4.

Question number 3 inquired at what level the respondents had been instructed in the use of phonemic transcription. Out of 53 respondents, 36% had been taught to read phonemic transcription at upper secondary school (lukio) level, 49% in lower secondary school (yläaste) level and 40% at primary school (ala-aste) level.

Lower secondary school being the clear winner was quite surprising, as previous research suggested that the use of phonemic symbols are mainly instructed in lower levels of education, before the emphasis of language teaching moves away from oral skills and communicative competence to more formal written language. Primary school students who are starting to learn a foreign language for the first time would also benefit from phonetic training the most, as they still getting used to the different phonetic and writing systems of different languages. In addition to this, phonemic transcription has been criticized as being too difficult for students, so upper secondary school, the level with the most advanced language learners being the clear winner here would be the most expected result. However, upper secondary level receiving the lowest amount of responses could possibly be explained by the fact

that upper secondary school courses mainly aim to prepare students for the matriculation examination, which currently does not measure the students' oral skills or pronunciation at all.

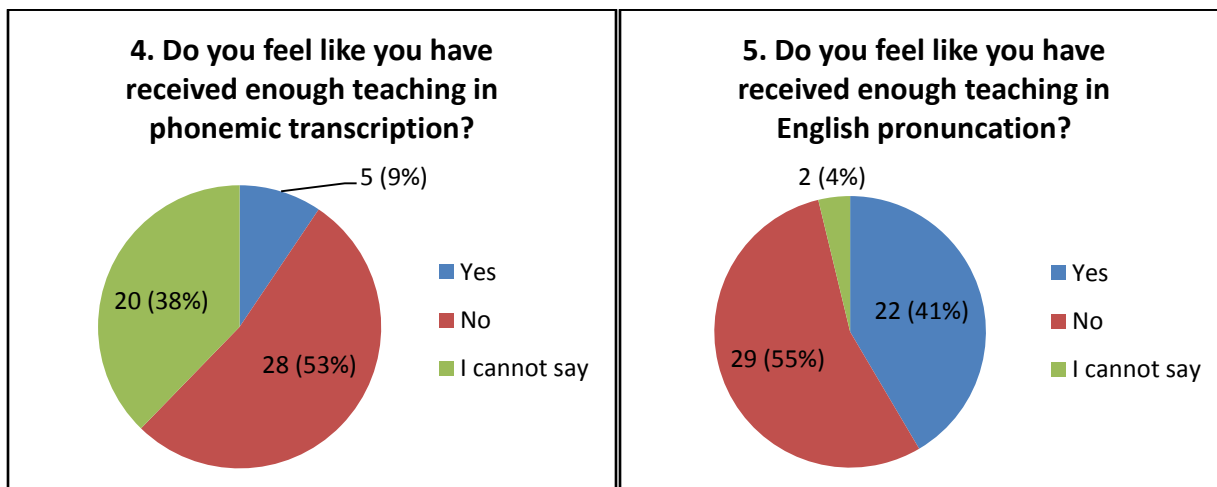


Table 4. The results of questions number 4 and 5.

Questions 4 and 5 enquired the respondents' personal opinions on the amount teaching they have received. Question 4 focused on phonemic transcription, asking if the respondents felt like they had received enough teaching in the use of phonemic transcriptions. Only 9% of the respondents reported the teaching had been sufficient in their opinion. As many as 53% of the respondents felt like phonemic transcription had not been taught as much as they had hoped. A relatively large amount of respondents, as many as 38%, were still unsure if the teaching they had received was sufficient enough. Question number 5 was identical to question number 4, but instead of phonemic transcription it focused on pronunciation teaching in general, asking the respondents if the pronunciation teaching they had received had been sufficient. A little less than a half of the respondents (41%) felt like the teaching of pronunciation they had received has been sufficient. 55% of the respondents thought that pronunciation has not been taught enough to them at school. 4% of respondents were unsure if the teaching has been sufficient enough. The results of both question 4 and question 5 can be seen above in table 4.

The most interesting finding in questions number 4 and 5 was the fact that only 9% of the respondents felt that they had received enough teaching in the use of phonemic transcription. Although in previous questions the number of respondents who had been taught phonemic transcription in some form was much higher than 9%, the quality and quantity of the teaching must not have been relatively poor. The

amount of respondents who were unsure of the amount of teaching they have received was also relatively high, as high as 38%. This can be interpreted in at least two different ways: the respondents cannot properly remember how much teaching they have received, or the respondents were unsure of the usefulness of learning phonemic transcription. Based on the open question analyzed later in this section, the majority of the respondents belong to the first group.

Pronunciation teaching is much more common than the teaching of phonemic transcription, and thus also easier to analyze. This can also be seen in the results, as only 4% of the respondents were unsure if the pronunciation teaching they have received had been sufficient enough (as opposed to 38% in the case of phonemic transcription). Although 41% of the respondents were satisfied with their pronunciation teaching, the majority seemed to think that more could have been done. Regrettably, the questionnaire did not enquire the respondents' experiences of other pronunciation teaching related activities and teaching methods, but few respondents reported in the open question that their pronunciation teaching mostly consisted of listening exercises.

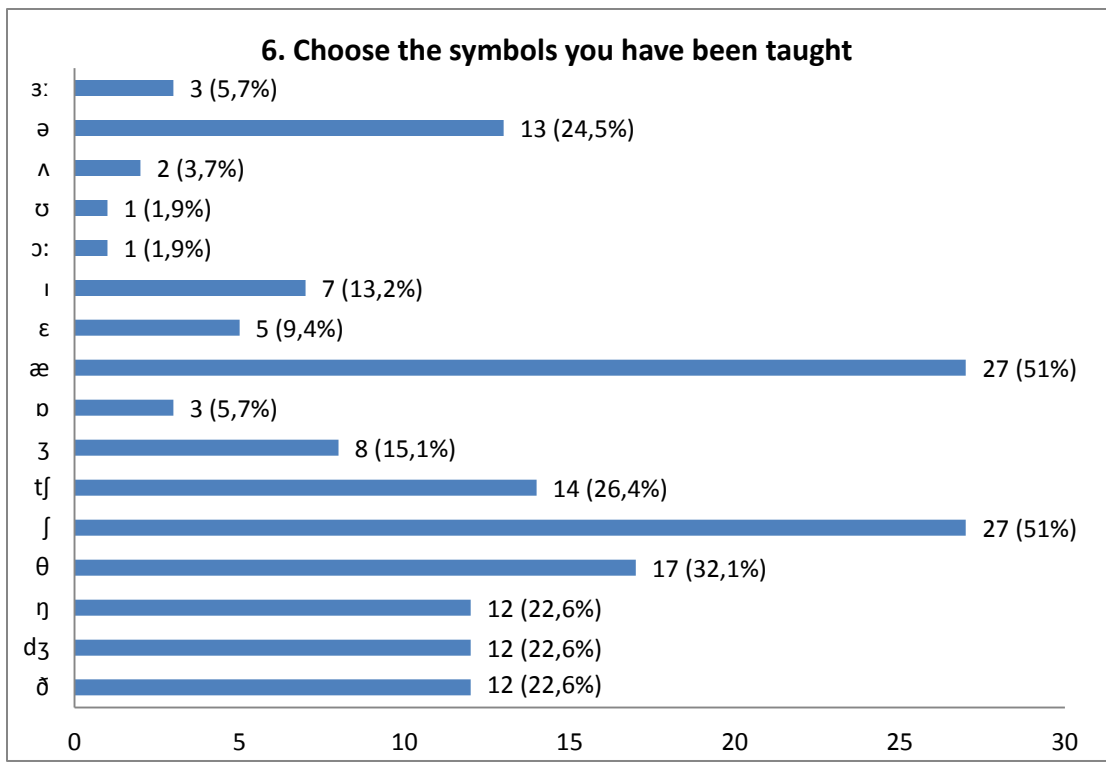


Table 5. The results of question number 6.

In question 6, the respondents were asked to select those phonetic symbols they had been taught to read in school. Only the symbols that are not used in roman alphabet were available for selection. The clear winners of this questions were symbols /ʃ/ and /æ/ with both selected by 27 (51%) of the respondents. Other symbols that were selected relatively often were symbols /θ ð dʒ ɲ tʃ ə/, selected in 22,6%-32,1% of responses. Apart from symbol /ʒ/, all symbols that received less than 10 selections were vowels. 13 respondents did not select any symbol available above.

Symbols /ʃ/ and /æ/ being the most selected symbols among the respondents was not surprising, as /ʃ/ is one of the most problematic sounds for Finnish learners. Symbol /æ/ being easily recognized can most likely be explained by the fact that the symbol is also used in Norwegian language, and should be recognized by most Finns. The schwa-sound (/ə/) was the fifth most selected symbol with 13 selections (24,5%). Although it was the fifth most selected symbol, 24,5% is extremely low for a symbol that appears in most English words. With the exception of the schwa sound and /æ/, only a handful of respondents (1-7) recognized other vowel symbols. This was quite expected, as vowels do not generally cause any problems for Finnish speakers, and some transcription systems do not even use the symbols presented above. The selection of affricates produced rather surprising data, as respondents that recognized /ʃ/ should have also recognized /tʃ/, as the only difference between these sounds is the fact that the affricate is a combination of the sibilant /ʃ/ and plosive /t/, which should be recognized by all respondents. Instead, the number of respondents who recognized /ʃ/ (29) was relatively higher than the number of respondents who recognized /tʃ/. The data of the voiced counterparts /ʒ/ and /dʒ/ produced the exact opposite results, as more respondents recognized the affricate /dʒ/ (12) than the sibilant /ʒ/ (8). This can partly be explained by the relative occurrences of phonemes in English, as /ʃ/ is much more common than /tʃ/, and /dʒ/ is also much more common than /ʒ/, which is the least frequent phoneme in the English language (Higgins 2002).

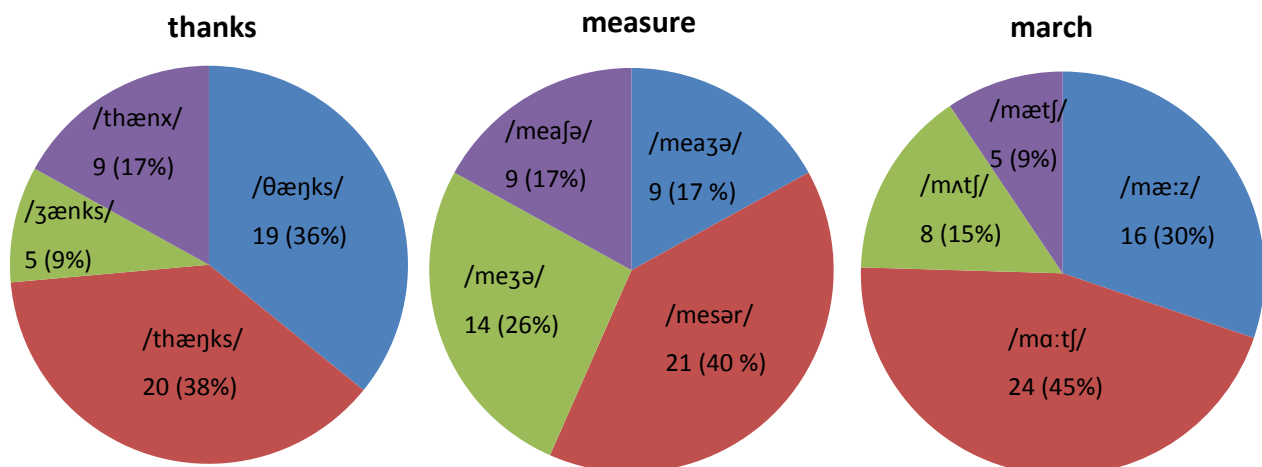


Table 6. The results of the three transcription exercises of question 7.

Question 7 measured the respondents' ability to read phonemic transcription, consisting of three small exercises. The respondents were given four different transcriptions and were asked to choose the one that they thought is the correct transcription for the words given above the transcriptions. In exercise number one, the correct answer (/θæŋks/) was chosen by 36% of the respondents, narrowly behind /thæŋks/ (38%). The amount of respondents choosing /zæŋks/ (9%) and /thænx/ (17%) was much lower than those who chose the previous two. In exercise two, only 26% of respondents chose the correct answer /mezə/. The majority of the respondents (40%) chose /mesər/, with /meəzə/ and /meaʃə/ both being selected by 17% of the respondents respectively. In exercise number three, the majority of the respondents managed to choose the correct answer /mɑ:tʃ/ (45%). The three other options were chosen by relatively less respondents with /mæ:z/ (30%), /mʌtʃ/ (8%) and /mætʃ/ (9%). The results of the three exercises can be seen above in table 6.

Only a quick glance at the percentages is needed to see that the general level of reading phonemic transcription is relatively poor, with the correct answers being chosen by 36%, 26% and 45% of the respondents respectively. The errors done by the respondents can be divided into two categories: not knowing the symbols or problems caused by letter-to-phoneme correspondence. The case of not knowing the symbol sufficiently can be seen well in exercise number one. Although /θ/ is one of the problem sounds for Finnish students, the majority of the respondents made the elementary mistake of choosing /th/ instead of /θ/. Selecting /x/ instead of /ks/ was another error that anyone with any

knowledge of transcription should not make, as although the letter x is pronounced /ks/, the phoneme /x/ is used to represent voiceless velar fricative only used in English in certain Scottish dialects, most notably in the word *loch*. Problems concerning the letter-to-phoneme can be seen well in exercise number two, as the option closest to the written spelling of the word *measure*, /mesər/, was chosen by nearly half of the respondents (40%). /meəzə/ and /meəfə/, although containing sibilants other than /s/, included /a/ that does not appear in the pronunciation of the word, only in the spelling of the word. Exercise number 3 tested the respondents ability to recognize longer vowels with the usage of /:/. 75% of the respondents chose the transcriptions with the long vowel used, which implies that the respondents understand the function of the colon in phonemic transcription.

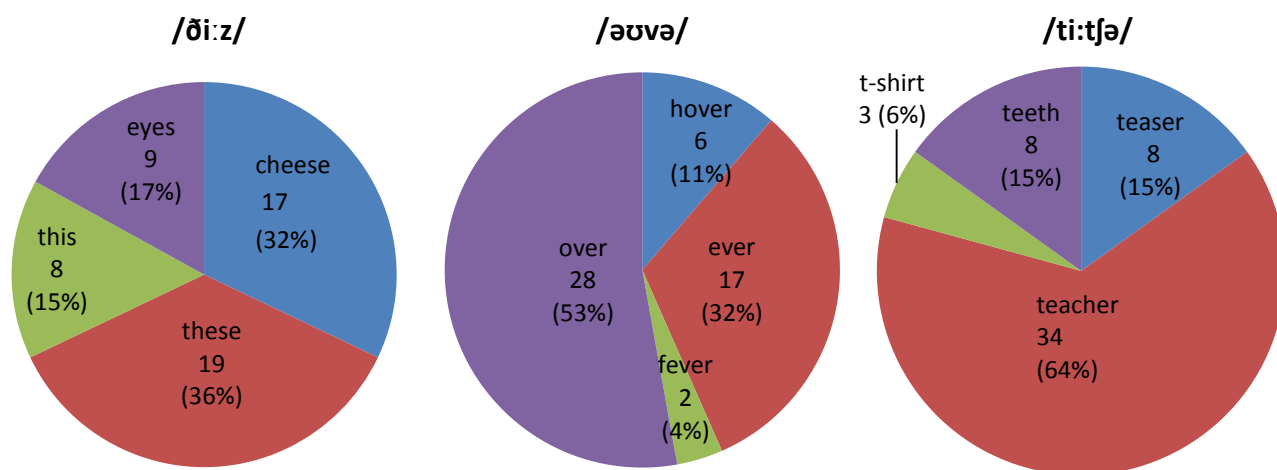


Table 7. The results of the three transcription exercises of question 8.

Question 8 also consisted of three different exercises, but this time the respondents were asked to choose the correct word for a given transcription. In exercise number one, 36% of the respondents chose the correct answer, *these*. The second most frequent answer was *cheese* with 32%. *Eyes* and *this* received relatively lower amount of responses, 17% and 15% respectively. In exercise number two, more than half of the respondents answered correctly with 53% choosing *over*. *Ever* (32%) was the second most frequent answer, and *hover* with 11% the third most frequent. Only 4% of the respondents chose *fever* as their answer. In exercise number three, as many as 64% of the respondents chose the correct answer, *teacher*. *Teeth* and *teaser* were chosen 15% of the respondents respectively, and only

6% of the respondents chose the word *t-shirt* as their answer. The results of these exercises are also presented above in table 7.

In the exercises of question 8, the respondents managed much better than they did in the exercises of question 7, with 36%, 53% and 64% choosing the correct answer. On average, the correct answer was chosen by 51% of the respondents, much more often than in question 7, where the correct answer was chosen by only 35,6% of the respondents on average. Either comparing a transcription to a given set of words is easier than comparing a word to given set of transcriptions, or the exercises were much easier than they were in question 7, as the options of question number 8 exercises consisted of real words that were familiar to the respondents. The majority of the respondents chose either *these* (36%) or *cheese* (32%) as their answer in question one. What separates these two options from the other two is the fact that both words have a long vowel sound (/i:/) in the middle of the word, meaning that just like in exercise number three in the previous question, the respondents had a clear understanding of the use of colon in transcription. The reason why *cheese* gained almost as many votes as *these* is most likely the symbol /ð/, which the respondents most likely have confused with the /tʃ/-sound of *cheese*. In exercise number two, *over* was the only logical choice here, as it is the only word that begins and ends with the same sound (schwa). This can also be seen in the results, as the word *over* was chosen by a little over a half of the respondents. The clear majority of the remaining half of the respondents chose *ever* as their answer, most likely due to the similarity between the written version of the word and the transcription (/əʊvə/ and *ever*), and due to the fact that the ə-symbol looks like an upside-down letter e, causing confusion in those not familiar with the symbol. Exercise number three seemed to be the easiest out of all six exercises, with as many as 64% of the respondents selecting the correct answer *teacher*. Although all four words begin with plosive the /t/ and the long vowel /i:/, *teacher* was the only logical choice here as it is the only one with the affricate /tʃ/.

4.2. The open question

Question number 9 asked the respondents to briefly elaborate their experiences with the use of phonemic transcription in pronunciation teaching. All the 53 responses can be seen in Appendix 2. The majority of the responses to question 9 can be divided into three different categories. The first group of responses were those that claimed that phonemic transcription had not been taught to the respondents at

all, and whose teachers have not even referred to the script even once during their studies. Roughly one third of all responses belong to this group. Some respondents reported that they had taught themselves the use of transcription with the help of school books, as most books have brief instruction manuals in the end of the book, although a few respondents also mentioned that despite books having the instructions, they had no motivation to learn them.

The second group of responses were those that stated that transcription had been taught to them, but only very briefly. More than a half of all responses belong to this group. In the respondents' opinion, the teaching that had happened had not been sufficient at all in order to allow them to understand and learn all the symbols, and many felt extremely uncertain of their skills, many stating that they could not answer any of the exercises in questions 8 and 9 with certainty. Many respondents also stated that some specific symbols were taught to them when pronunciation problems occurred, but with no repetition, practice or practical use the symbols were quickly forgotten. Some respondents stated that transcription had been taught to them as early as in primary school, but the symbols were forgotten as no repetition ever occurred. Teachers also referred to the phonemic transcriptions in the vocabulary section of the book from time to time, but did not specify what the different phonetic symbols meant. Some respondents also stated that the symbols had been present in many listening exercises, but the symbols themselves had not been used at all. Respondents' school books had also plenty of exercises with transcription involved, but generally these were ignored as the teacher wanted to focus on other areas of language.

The third group of responses included those that stated that phonemic transcription and phonetic symbols had been taught to the respondents extensively. This group consisted of only a few responses. One of the respondents reported that he or she had had a teacher in primary school who was very focused on teaching pronunciation. Another respondent stated that every sound and symbol had been taught to them systematically every now and then, and repeated if any specific pronunciation problems occurred. One respondent stated that the symbols had also been taught systematically, and so well that he or she had no problems whatsoever with the exercises. The respondent also said that he or she finds the symbols a vital part of learning pronunciation.

Overall, the responses to question 9 proved that the teaching of phonemic transcription and phonemic symbols is very irregular in Finnish schools, as the respondents have had experiences ranging from not being taught phonetic symbols at all to being taught the symbols extensively.

5. Discussion

The results seem to indicate that phonetic transcription is rarely used systematically to teach pronunciation. The lack of its use may be explained with a combination of many different reasons: teachers not valuing phonemic transcription high enough, teachers preferring the use of other teaching methods to teach pronunciation or teachers simply not focusing on pronunciation teaching enough, which seems to be the main reason based on previous research. Unfortunately this study focused on the use of phonemic transcription from the students' point of view only, so the real reason for its little use can only be speculated, although it is safe to assume that the unfilled potential of phonemic transcription is part of a bigger problem that is the lack of pronunciation teaching in Finland.

The biggest problem of pronunciation teaching in Finland seems to be the fact that it is not taught enough, and the methods seem unclear as well. As mentioned in section 2.4, teachers have reported that the biggest reason for the negligence towards pronunciation teaching is lack of time, and that they do value pronunciation, and would like to allocate more time into teaching it. Most students in Finland spend approximately ten years studying English as foreign language, and given the fact that Lintunen's students required only as little as 42 contact hours of transcription and phonetic training to achieve major improvements in their pronunciation, the lack of time cannot be considered as the main reason for the lack of teaching.

One of the reasons behind the lack of teaching pronunciation could be the fact that there does not seem to be a standard way of teaching it. Although many different methods such as transcription and phonetic training exist and have plenty of teaching material available, they are used rather irregularly, if they are used at all. The few respondents who described the pronunciation teaching they have received in the open question of this thesis stated that the majority was done via listening and repeating exercises. It would seem like the majority of teachers rely on the assumption that good language

learners are able to learn accurate pronunciation through listening, although an inept ear without the help of a point of reference or proper ear training (discriminating individual sounds) will not be able to pick up all the phonetic details of sounds. Another reason why phonetic training would be useful for language learners is the fact that the students and teachers often share the same first language in Finland, and with that language also a phonetic system, making accented speech more intelligible to them. Heavily accented speech that is clearly intelligible to a Finnish-speaking English teacher might not be intelligible at all to a native speaker of English. This could be one of the reasons why teachers do not seem to value the importance of advanced phonetic training.

Another possible reason for the lack of pronunciation teaching is the fact that pronunciation is one of the areas of language that are not tested or evaluated in the Finnish school system. The education of upper secondary school (lukio) is mainly a preparation for the matriculation examination, which does not include any exercises for pronunciation at all. Testing and evaluating each students' pronunciation is extremely time consuming, but only one exercise during the matriculation examination would greatly improve the importance of pronunciation teaching. The other areas of language are tested via grammar, vocabulary and writing exercises, but the entire communicative proficiency of the student is only tested via listening exercises. As teachers and students alike want to produce better results, allocating time, work and resources into pronunciation teaching, teaching that has no effect on the students' performance in school may not seem as important as allocating time into improving those areas that are regularly tested and evaluated, especially if the content is seen as an extra burden to the students (phonemic transcription for example), and if some pronunciation can be learned as a by-product of other areas of language. As can be seen in previous research as well, the lack of regulation in pronunciation teaching means that the amount and the methods of pronunciation teaching are often based on how much time and work the teaching is willing to sacrifice from other more meaningful areas. The lack of regulation also brings forth problems in the use of phonemic transcription, as a great number of words can have multiple different transcriptions depending on the accent used. Although RP English (Received Pronunciation, standard English accent) is considered by many as the standard English accent of research and education in Europe (Morris-Wilson, 2009), many teachers choose to teach their students the General American accent of English (GA) instead. The use of multiple accents in the classroom may cause some confusion among the students, especially if the accent used by the teachers differs from the accent used in teaching material. It is yet unknown if the curriculum reform

of 2016 will bring more order and regulation into pronunciation teaching, but as can be seen from in the Common European Framework of Reference mentioned in section 2.4, the current system does not sufficiently specify, stress or emphasize pronunciation teaching and its methods.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the thesis succeeded at answering all three research questions. Based on the data it produced, it can be said that phonemic transcription is not taught enough in Finnish schools. Its use as a teaching method is not regular or sufficient enough to allow students to use it adequately, especially when compared to the emphasis given to it in the teaching materials. Although the thesis offered a small amount of new information compared to previous research, it pointed out some major flaws that occur in pronunciation teaching today, and serves as a good starting point for possible future research. Future research is required mostly because of the obvious limitations of the study, as the thesis itself focused on the use of phonemic transcription from the students' point of view only. In reality, deciding on the use of transcriptions falls upon the teachers, the book publishers, the board of education and the universities responsible for training the teachers. The study itself produced more problems and open questions than solutions and answers, and those cannot be solved without knowing the stance and opinions of the aforementioned parties. Another reason why further research is required is the fact that researching as many different aspects of pronunciation teaching is one way of ensuring that pronunciation teaching gets the attention it requires. Recent research, for example Lintunen (2004) and Tegrujeff (2012a), unanimously suggest that pronunciation teaching in Finland is not reaching its full potential, and with a curriculum reform on the way, a reform, or at least a thorough inspection is required.

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Attachments

Appendix 1 – The questionnaire

Foneettisen transkription käyttö englannin kielen opetuksessa

Tutkin foneettisen transkription käyttöä suomalaisessa koulujärjestelmässä. Foneettista/foneemista transkriptiota, eli tarkekirjoitusta, käytetään lähes poikkeuksetta jokaisessa englannin kielen oppikirjassa, ja sillä kuvataan vastaavan sanan lausumista erilaisilla foneettisilla symboleilla, esimerkiksi: /'ðɪs ɪz fɑ: tu: ɪntəl'ektʃuəl fə mɪ/. Erityisen tuttua sen pitäisi olla oppikirjojen sanasto-osuudesta, johon sitä on aina merkattu uuden opittavan sanan perään.

Alla olevaan kyselyyn vastaamalla autat minua saamaan enemmän selville enemmän transkription nykyisestä asemasta englannin kielen opetuksessa. Kyselyssä kartoitetaan vuosina 2010-2015 valmistuneiden ylioppilaiden saamaa opetusta sekä heidän kykyään ymmärtää foneettista transkriptiota. Vastaus tapahtuu täysin anonyymisti ja vie aikaa vain muutaman minuutin verran.

Vastaa siis kyselyyn, jos olet:

- Valmistunut suomenkielisestä lukiosta viimeisen viiden vuoden sisällä (2010-2015)

Mutta älä vastaa kyselyyn, jos olet:

- Opiskellut fonetiikkaa jossain muodossa lukiosta valmistumisen jälkeen (esim. kielet, logopedia, yms)

*Required

Onko sinua opetettu lukemaan foneettista transkriptiota? *

- Ei ollenkaan
- Muutamia merkkejä
- Useita merkkejä
- Kaikki merkit

Onko sinua opetettu vain lukemaan transkriptiota, vai myös kirjoittamaan sitä? *

- Ei ole opetettu lukemaan
- Opetettu lukemaan
- Opetettu lukemaan ja kirjoittamaan

Jos transkription opetusta on tapahtunut, sitä on tapahtunut

- Ala-asteella
- Yläasteella
- Lukiossa
- Other:

Koetko saaneesi tarpeeksi opetusta foneettisen transkriptiosta? *

- Kyllä
- Ei
- En osaa sanoa

Koetko saaneesi tarpeeksi opetusta englannin ääntämisestä? *

- Kyllä
- Ei
- En osaa sanoa

Valitse ne symbolit, jotka sinulle on opetettu

- ð
- dʒ
- ŋ
- θ
- ʃ
- tʃ
- ʒ
- ɒ
- æ
- ε
- ɪ
- ɔ:
- ʊ
- ʌ
- ə
- ɜ:

Valitse seuraavissa tehtävissä annettua sanaa vastaava transkriptio

Vain yksi vaihtoehto on oikein

thanks *

- ___/θæŋks/
- ___/thæŋks/
- ___/zæŋks/
- ___/thænx/

measure *

- /meɪzə/
- /mesər/
- /meɪzə/
- /meɪfə/

march *

- /mæ:z/
 - /mɑ:tʃ/
 - /mʌtʃ/
 - /mætʃ/
-

Valitse seuraavissa tehtävissä annettua transkriptiota vastaava sana

Vain yksi vaihtoehto on oikein

/ði:z/ *

- cheese
- these
- this
- eyes

/əʊvə/ *

- hover
- ever
- fever
- over

/ti:tʃə/ *

- teaser
 - teacher
 - t-shirt
 - teeth
-

*Kerro lyhyesti omista kokemuksistasi foneettisen transkription käytöstä opetuksessa **

Appendix 2 – Responses to the open question

1. Ei opetettu lainkaan mutta opin jotenkin kirjasta
2. Liian vähäistä. Testin perusteella en pystynyt vastaamaan varmuudella yhteenkään
3. Ala-asteella opetettiin, mutta unohtuivat nopeasti. Niitä ei myöhemmin kerrattu, joten unohtuivat lähes täysin. Yleisestikin ääntämistä opetettiin liian vähän.
4. Kai näitä joskus on opetettu
5. En osaa laisinkaan.
6. Ei taidettu ottaa puheeksikaan tunneilla.
7. Ei koskaan opetettu, ainoastaan aiheuttanut ihmetystä kirjojen sivuilla. Tuskin opettajatkaan koskaan osannu näitä lukea. Ääntämistäkin opeteltiin ainoastaan opettajan perässä toistellen ja virheitä korjaillen, jos edes sitäkään.
8. Todella vähän on ollut ja sen takia varmaan oma englannin kielen lausuminen huonoa.
9. Huonoa
10. Aika vähäistä
11. Opettaja sanoi että tuossa on lausumisohteet, lausui sanan muttei ikinä kertonut mitä yksittäiset "lausumismerkit" tarkoittivat
12. Joitain yksittäisiä ja satunnaisia kirjaimia on opetettu ääntämisen yhteydessä, hyvin huonolla menestyksellä. Ääntämistä on opetettu ennemminkin matkimalla opettajaa kuin foneettisen transkription avulla.
13. Muistikuvat opetuksesta ovat hatarat. Muistaakseni sitä on opetettu lähinnä tulkitsemaan ääntämisen tukena.
14. Aika vähäistä.

15. Ala-asteella oli todella hyvä englanninopettaja, joka painotti ääntämistä. Kaikki mitä muistan on sieltä lähtöisin.
16. Sitä ei ole kovin paljoa painotettu. Esimerkiksi foneettisesta transkriptiosta kirjoitettuun muotoon ei ole kovin paljoa kokemusta. Sanat osaa lausua, mutta transkriptio pitää melkein arvata.
17. En osaa
18. Ei ole paljoa panostettu koulujen puolesta, voisi opettaa enemmän näitä
19. Ala-asteella käytiin vähän läpi
20. Muistan että meille on opetettu ala- ja yläasteella lukemaan ääntämisohejeita, mutta en osaisi kirjoittaa ääntämisohejeita sanoihin tai en luultavasti tunnista ääntämisohejeita sanoja.
21. Foneettinen transkriptio ohitettiin usein ylä-asteella/lukiossa. Muistan juuri esimerkit sanojen vieressä. Kirjoissa oli vastaavanlaisia tehtäviä kuin tässä testissä, mutta ne ohitettiin nopeasti ja siirryttiin ”tärkeämpiin”.
22. Ei juuri opetettu, pari merkkiä neuvottiin ohimennen sivulauseen loppupuolella. Ei käytännössä otettu huomioon opetuksessa.
23. Opetettiin varmaan äänne kerrallaan sanoissa ja käytiin uudestaan läpi jos joku sana oli vaikea, mutta ei koskaan ollut mitään tuntia erikseen, että naita merkkejä oltais opiskeltu.
24. Ala-asteella perusteet ja ylä-asteella hieman kerrattu.
25. En osaa, enkä koe niitä tarpeelliseksi
26. Eipä ole kukaan opettanut. Itse opetellut asiat.
27. Hyvin vähän käytetty, muutamia symboleita käyty läpi ylä-asteella / lukiossa.
28. Minun oli hieman hankala vastata näihin kysymyksiin sillä oli niin vähän en osaa sanoa vastausvaihtoehtoja. Tähän syynä se että englannintunneillani on ehkä muistaakseni käyty näitä asioita mutta en ole koskaan niitä joutunut opettelemaan sillä olen asunut lapsena Yhdysvalloissa ja käynyt siellä myös koulua. Jolloin ääntämisasiat olen oppinut käytännön kautta natiivien puhujien kanssa.
29. Ei ole opetettu, kirjoissa noita oli mutta ei ollut motivaatiota opetella
30. Ei mitään
31. En ole opetellut
32. Eipä oo hirveästi kokemusta meikö pojalla. Ala-asteella muistan että kirjoissa oli näitä kiekuroita, mutta en minä niistä ymmärtänyt hölkäsen pöläystä. Rallienglantia senku rapatin menemään mitä sielusta irtosi.
33. Ei ole koskaan opetettu kunnolla, pari merkkiä silloin tällöin. Oman ääntämisen perusteella itseoppinut myös osan. Monesti vaikea ymmärtää varsinkin nuorempina oppikirjoista.
34. Ala-asteella joskus tuli kotitehtäviä näihin liittyen, muuta en muista tarkasti.
35. Muistan niiden olemassaolon kirjoissa. Tämä testi kuitenkin paljasti, etten todellisuudessa osaa niitä kauhean hyvin.
36. ei niihi kiinnitetty huomiota
37. Muutama esimerkki näytetty ja asia on unohdettu. Varmasti en osannut mihinkään näistä vastata.
38. Eipä niitä paljon opeteta
39. Aika vähäiseksi jäänyt.
40. Katseltu kuunteluharjoitusten yhteydessä
41. Koulussa ei ole panostettu opetukseen. Henk.koht. en ole kokenut niitä tarpeelliseksi, koska olen oppinut kielet korva kuulolta.

42. Lukiossa joskus tehtiin äänneharjoituksia, muttei muistikuvia yläasteelta. Ala-asteella käytiin jotain merkkejä läpi, muttei itse ääntämistä paljoa opeteltu.
43. Käyttö vähäistä opetuksessa
44. Taidettiin kaikki kirjaimet opetella, mutta ilmeisesti aika nopeaa, kun ei kaikkia enää edes muista.
45. Yläasteella opetettiin sanojen opetteluun yhteydessä muutamia merkkejä niin että opettaja luki ensin sanan ja painotti erikoisia ääntämismerkkejä ja oppilaat toistivat. Aihe kuitenkin tuntuu nyt vieraalta ja en osaa ääntää kuin muutaman merkin.
46. Omasta mielestäni ne ovat jääneet hyvin muistiin, ja niiden opettaminen on tärkeää ääntämisen oppimisen kannalta.
47. Kirjoitin ylioppilaaksi 2011 ja tämän jälkeen en ole sen kummennin törmännyt korkeakouluopetuksessa.
48. Yleensä ääntämisen ja/tai kuulemisen lisänä nähnyt transkription josta pääteltyt ääntämisen ja soveltanut tulevaisuudessa.
49. Ei ole opetettu, opettelin jotenkin kirjasta
50. Melko vähän on ollut, lähinnä muistan erilaisten a-kirjaimien ääntämysten opetusta.
51. Koulussa käyty lyhyesti läpi mitä tarkoittavat, mutta en ole hirveästi ikinä kiinnittänyt niihin erityisesti huomiota sanoja opetellessani.
52. Ei ole juuri kiinnitetty huomiota opetuksessa. Ääntämistä olen lähinnä harjoitellut opettajan ohjeistuksella, ainoastaan korvakuulolta.
53. Ei ollenkaan.