

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
PHONEMIC TRANSCRIPTION AS A TEACHING  
METHOD:

A survey of English students

Bachelor's thesis  
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Foneeminen tarkekirjoitus on pitkään ollut osa ääntämisen opetusta. Se on ainut tapa, jolla sanojen ja puhunnosten ääntämisaasuun voidaan viitata ilman tulkinnanvaraa, ja lisäksi yksi harvoista visuaalisista apuvälineistä, jotka soveltuvat erityisesti ääntämisen opetukseen. Foneemisessa tarkekirjoituksessa käytetään kansainvälisen foneettisen aakkoston (IPA) symboleja.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen aiheena on englannin kielen opettajaopiskelijoiden asenteet foneemista tarkekirjoitusta kohtaan oppimisvälineenä. Tutkimuksen päätavoitteena on selvittää, kuinka paljon ja millä tavoilla opiskelijat kokevat hyötyneensä foneemisen tarkekirjoituksen opiskelusta ääntämyksen opiskelussa. Lisäksi pyritään selvittämään, aikovatko opiskelijat käyttää foneemista tarkekirjoitusta opetusvälineenä tulevilla opettajan urallaan.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa havaittiin, että suurin osa opiskelijoista koki foneemisen tarkekirjoituksen hyödylliseksi omalla kohdallaan. Foneemisen tarkekirjoituksen osaaminen katsottiin tärkeäksi taidoksi kieliammattilaiselle, mutta tästä huolimatta moni oli epävarma sen käyttämisestä omassa opetuksessaan, koska sen nähtiin vievän liikaa aikaa suhteessa saatuun hyötyyn nähden. Foneemisen tarkekirjoituksen hyödyllisimmiksi käyttökohteiksi nähtiin sanapainoon ja yksittäisiin äänneisiin keskittyminen. Vaikeasti äännettäviä sanoja on helpompi opetella, kun ne pystytään pilkkomaan pienempiin osiin, minkä nähtiin kasvattavan opiskelijan itseluottamusta. Suurimpina etuina nähtiin se, että foneemisen tarkekirjoituksen osatessaan opiskelija voi tarkistaa sanojen äänneasut itsenäisesti ja että se on, toisin kuin auditiiviset mallit, stabiilia.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Phonemic transcription has been a part of pronunciation teaching for a long time. It is one of the few visual aids that a teacher can use when teaching pronunciation, and probably the most important and popular. Many Finns remember seeing them in EFL textbooks, but only a few of them really know how to use them after primary and/or secondary education (Lintunen 2004). Recently, pronunciation's role in the Finnish national core curricula has grown significantly (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014; Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2015), which has in its turn increased the use of phonemic transcription. Phonemic transcription is basically writing words and phrases the way they are pronounced without regard to their orthography. *Phonemic transcription* uses the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet (e.g. /æm'bigjʊəs/), which differentiates it from *phonemic respelling* that uses the symbols of the language's conventional writing system (e.g. "am-BIG-yoo-uh-s").

The present study focuses on student attitudes towards phonemic transcription. Phonemic transcription as a teaching method is not a very well-researched topic, and studies about student attitudes are practically non-existent. Lintunen's (2004) study discusses the issue with university students as the target group, but only briefly. This, and the author's positive experiences about phonemic transcription in learning pronunciation were the most important motives for this study. The main purpose for this study is to find out how much and in what ways phonemic transcription has helped English students in learning pronunciation. This is assumed to be in connection with the students' willingness to use phonemic transcription in their future careers, which this is another issue this study will explore.

## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1. Theoretical background

Phonemic transcription is essentially a simplified version of phonetic transcription. The IPA, which stands for the International Phonetic Alphabet (and the organization behind the system, the International Phonetic Association), was invented over a hundred years ago in order to create "a generally agreed set of symbols for designating sounds unambiguously" (Handbook of the International Phonetic Association: A guide to the use of the International Phonetic

Alphabet 1999, p. 3). The need for arose from the fact that languages rarely have a one-to-one correspondence between graphemes and phonemes, and thus, one cannot tell a word's pronunciation from its orthography. English is among the most notorious European languages in this sense, because it has one of the worst grapheme-to-phoneme correspondence (Morris-Wilson 2004, p. 2). With these kinds of languages, phonemic transcription is especially useful (Rogerson-Revell 2011, p. 243). The fundamental difference between phonemic and phonetic transcription is that whereas in the first one “the only *units* to be symbolized are those which have a linguistic function, i.e. the phonemes” and in the latter “sounds are symbolized on the basis of their *articulatory/auditory* identity, regardless of their *function* in a *language*” (Crystal 2008, p. 490, small capitals replaced with italics).

For example, in several British English varieties, /l/ is systematically pronounced in two ways, i.e. there are two allophones of /l/. It is usually pronounced as a voiced alveolar lateral approximant, but in certain phonetical environments (see Morris-Wilson 2004, p. 112 for the exact rule) the sound becomes velarized. These are often referred to as the “clear” and the “dark” allophones of /l/ respectively (Morris-Wilson 2004, p. 111). The phonemic transcriptions the English words “lick” and “kill” are /lɪk/ and /kɪl/ respectively; the first one is pronounced with the clear /l/ and the latter with the dark variant. The sound colloquially referred to as the “l-sound” has the same symbol in the phonemic transcriptions of both words, because although the two sounds differ from each other in terms of sound quality, they both are recognized as one and the same “l-sound” by any native speaker of English. In other words, they serve the same linguistic function, and thus, they both use the same symbol /l/ in phonemic transcription. However, should one use phonetic transcription, the symbols for the two different realizations of the sounds would have to be explicitly indicated. The symbol for /l/ is [l] for the basic “l-sound” and [ɫ] for the velarized variant. As seen above, phonemic transcription is enclosed in slash brackets and phonetic transcription in square brackets.

Phonemic transcription, as Alfred C. Gimson stated in the foreword to Morris-Wilson's (1984, xi) book, is a good way “to reinforce analytically the information which the learner may have received imperfectly by ear.” English learners, by definition, are bound to misunderstand, mishear and make mistakes. In order to refer accurately to the sounds that students fail to produce, it is difficult to avoid phonemic transcription (Lintunen 2004, p. 36). This is probably why phonetics and transcription is taught in universities: every language teacher needs to know the phonological system of the language and how to refer to it in order to be able to teach it

confidently (Lintunen 2004, p. 36). One thing that the author of this paper found especially helpful as a learner was that after learning every phoneme of English by heart, one has a certain set of sounds to choose from. When one knows what sounds and sound combinations are possible in English, it becomes substantially easier to figure out the pronunciation of a word by means of deduction. It is also a well-established that people have different learning styles, and phonemic transcription is particularly beneficial for the visual learner.

The Nativeness Principle and the Intelligibility Principle can be seen as the two extremes in pronunciation teaching (Levis 2005, p. 370). The first is based on the assumption that native-like pronunciation can and should be pursued in pronunciation teaching. The latter, being the more modern ideology, argues that a learner's speech only needs to be understandable. Because of the growing popularity of the latter, attention given to pronunciation teaching has decreased (Tergujeff 2013, p. 9-10). Nevertheless, pronunciation plays a key role in the first impression that one gives of him/herself and is also one of the most important linguistic factors that shape one's personal identity (ibid. p. 9). Moreover, Morris-Wilson (2004, p. 1-20) discusses the reasons for learning good pronunciation in the introduction to his book. In his study, he discovered that native speakers of English tend to react negatively to Finnish-accented speech. Traits associated with competence and social status are downgraded when speaking with a Finnish accent, whereas traits that are linked to personality and friendliness are not affected by it. With all of the above in mind, it is an underestimation to claim that getting understood is the only thing that matters in pronunciation. Especially a language professional's credibility is in jeopardy if systematic mispronunciations occur.

## **2.2. Previous studies**

Several studies about attitudes towards phonemic transcription have been made. The only one that discusses Finnish university students' attitudes towards phonemic transcription is the one included in Lintunen's (2004, p. 183-188) dissertation. Although just a short questionnaire having only five questions, it serves as a basis for further research. The majority of students felt that phonemic transcription helps in improving one's pronunciation (which the results of his study confirmed) and that phonemic transcription is easy to understand. As shown in Kauppinen's study (2015, p. 41), teachers of English do not agree on the necessity of teaching phonemic transcription. Although all five teachers he interviewed were particularly interested in phonetics and phonology, only one of them really aspired to teach phonemic symbols to her

students, whereas the other four thought that they should concentrate more on practical issues when teaching pronunciation (p. 32). He claims that the use of phonemic transcription in teaching depends heavily on the teacher's preferences (p. 32), which is reinforced by the fact that teachers are not obliged in any way to teach phonemic transcription by national curricula (POPS 2014; LOPS 2015). Tergujeff's (2012a, p. 37-39) study about pronunciation teaching on primary and upper secondary level schools found that many Finnish teachers of English have positive views about teaching their students how to read phonemic transcription. However, few of them think that their students should learn how to write it. The teachers felt that writing phonemic transcription is an unnecessary skill for their students, and that especially younger students are only confused by it, because they are already struggling with the orthography.

It is reasonable to claim that the use of phonemic transcription in teaching English is neglected in Finnish schools. Although Finnish textbooks of English make extensive use of phonemic transcription (Tergujeff 2010, p. 195) and Finnish teachers of English learn to read and write it in university, phonemic transcription as a teaching method seems to be almost entirely restricted into higher education, i.e. universities. Lintunen (2004, p. 187) found in his study that few upper secondary graduates have been taught how to use phonemic transcription: as much as 76.9% of first-year university students had been taught only some phonetic symbols or none at all. The situation has not improved much since: Only one teacher of the four that Tergujeff (2012b, p. 604) observed for a total of 32 lessons used phonemic script in her teaching. The reasons behind this are unclear. Neglect of phonemic transcription cannot be justified with difficulty of learning it nor can it be justified with teachers' insufficient skills. As stated above, the textbooks that Finnish teachers use provide plenty of material for practising phonemic transcription. Furthermore, Lintunen's (2004) study found that English students, many of which will become English teachers, think that phonemic transcription is a useful teaching method. Contrary to the positive view towards phonemic transcription that future teachers of English have, it is rarely used in Finnish schools.

Although the majority of upper secondary graduates have received insufficient, if any, teaching in phonemic transcription, 96.6% of Lintunen's (2004, p. 187) research subjects thought that either all phonetic symbols or some of them were easy to understand. On basis of the above and my personal experiences, it is reasonable to claim that phonemic transcription is relatively easy to learn. As Lintunen (2004, p. 27) suggests, phonemic script might actually be particularly

easy for Finnish learners, because Finns are accustomed to the basic idea of phonemic transcription through the almost-phonemic orthography of Finnish, but this has yet to be proven.

### **3 THE PRESENT STUDY**

#### **3.1. Research aims**

The attitudes that university students of English have towards phonemic script were researched in this study. Primarily, I wanted to know if university students feel that it is necessary and worth learning in the sense that their pronunciation has been improved because of learning phonemic transcription. Answering to this questions requires knowing the benefits of learning phonemic script, and the amount of effort that it requires. A secondary objective for the study will be investigating how much university students value correct pronunciation as a skill of a language professional. After all, according to Lintunen's (2005, p. 1) article, the use of phonemic transcriptions as a teaching method varies considerably between individual teachers, and often the reason is the teacher's opinion on phonemic transcription's effectiveness. In addition, the study aims to find out the students' views towards using phonemic transcription as a tool in their future profession that is teaching English.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. Do Finnish university students think that phonemic transcription is worth learning when improving one's English pronunciation?
  - a. Do they think that their own pronunciation has improved because of it?
  - b. Do they think it is easy or difficult to learn?
  - c. What are the specific ways in which phonemic transcription has helped them learn pronunciation?
2. Do they think that they will use reading or writing phonemic transcription as a teaching method in their future career?
3. Have they been satisfied with the teaching of pronunciation and phonetics that they have received in the university?
4. According to them, how important is correct & good pronunciation for a language professional?



### 3.2. Methods & analysis

The method chosen for data collection was to conduct a survey. The survey was made by using a professional-level online survey service, Webropol, which was provided by the University of Jyväskylä. A link to the questionnaire was sent to the mailing list of English students in Jyväskylä and their student organization's Facebook group to ensure that it reaches the most of the target group. These two are the most important channels of information for English students, and therefore I am positive that the questionnaire reached the students that would have been willing to respond to it in the first place. The same instructions for filling the questionnaire were included both in the email and in the Facebook post. The target group was restricted to English teacher students, because by doing so, the responses to the questionnaire provide both a student's and a teacher's point of view, although the respondents are not graduated nor experienced teachers yet. The required minimum amount of responses was set at twenty-five.

Some background information of the students was asked first before the actual questions. These included the students' age, gender, years in university, minor subjects, the amount of teaching experience in months and what courses on phonemic transcription they have taken both in and outside their major subject, English. The actual questionnaire included nine statements about phonemic transcription, pronunciation and pronunciation teaching. The respondents could either agree or disagree to these statements on a 5-point Likert scale, where number 1 stood for "strongly disagree" and number 5 for "strongly agree." In addition to the Likert scale questions, three open-ended questions were included in the end, of which the first one was a follow-up for Question 16. In the remaining questions, the students could discuss the reasons for the usefulness of phonemic transcription and give examples of how it has helped them in learning pronunciation.

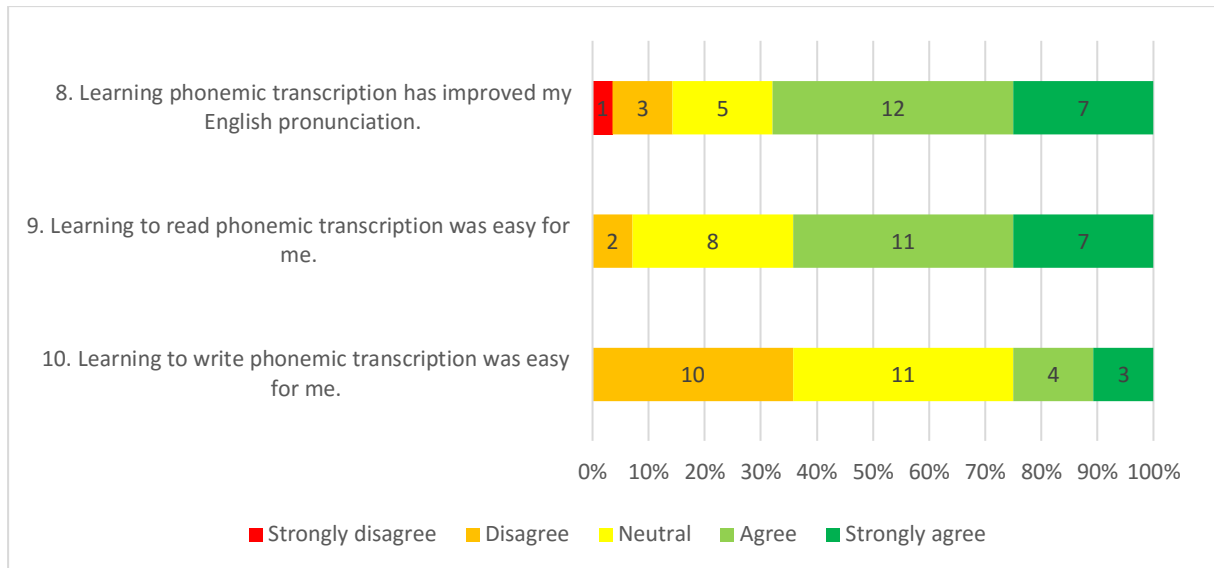
Two question pairs were included in the questionnaire. Questions 1 and 2 were formulated in the same way but the first was about the difficulty of reading and the other about the difficulty of writing phonemic transcription. This was to confirm the assumption that reading phonemic script is easier than writing it. Questions 6 and 7 were formulated with the Intelligibility and Nateness Principles in mind (see Levis 2005). It was expected that Question 6 will receive a significantly more positive reaction, because it is a statement to which supporters both principles can agree. Question 7, however, is a statement which only the supporters of the

Nativeness Principle should agree with, and therefore it should receive a more negative response.

The analysis of the Likert scale questions was done by Webropol: it provided the average value and the distribution of answers for every question both as numbers and as percentages. In the results section, the focus is on the percentages. In addition, the responses to the open-ended questions were analysed by means of content analysis in order to find recurring themes. Although the questions were quite similar, their responses were analysed separately. The themes found in the responses were arranged in a simple Excel file, and the number of mentions for every theme was counted and marked in the table. As a result, the nature of this study is highly quantitative: the Likert-scale questions provide quantitative data and the data gathered from the open-ended questions was converted into numerical form.

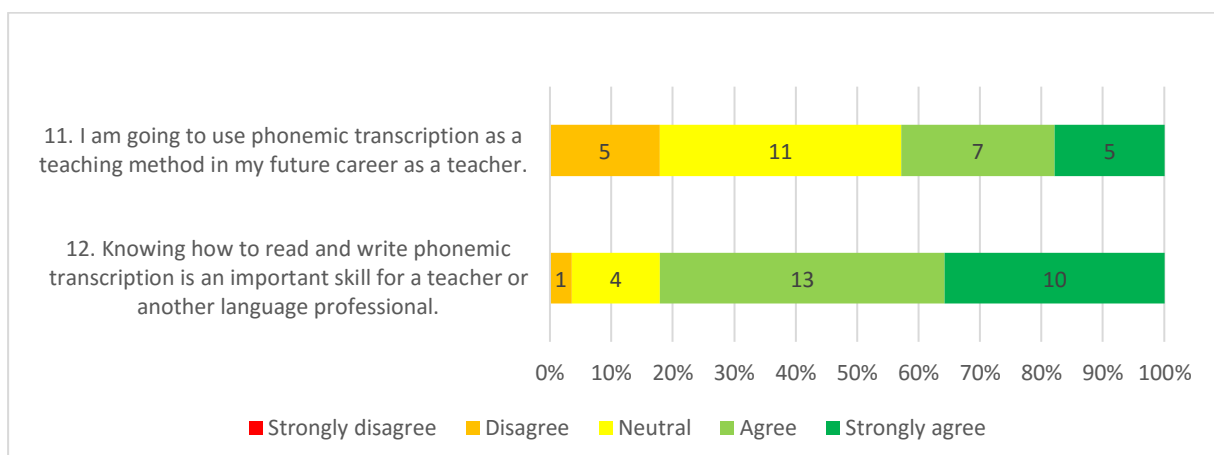
## **4 RESULTS**

The questionnaire yielded a total of 28 responses. The goal was to get at least 25 responses, which was met. Of the respondents, 9 (32%) were male and 19 (68%) female and their ages varied between 20 and 31 years. 19 respondents (66%) studied at least one another language as their minor subject. There were four respondents that did not list pedagogical studies as a minor subject, although the survey's instructions said that one should have pedagogical studies as a minor subject in order to be a valid respondent. The survey also had some questions that only a future teacher could answer, so it is safe to assume that the majority of respondents are going to be English teachers in the future. On the average, the respondents had studied English for 3.5 years in university. The respondents had low experience in teaching languages, as 10 (35%) had no experience whatsoever and 9 (32%) had three months or less. Every respondent had taken the basic phonetics course during their English basic studies in the University of Jyväskylä, and 13 (46%) had received phonetics and/or pronunciation teaching in another language.



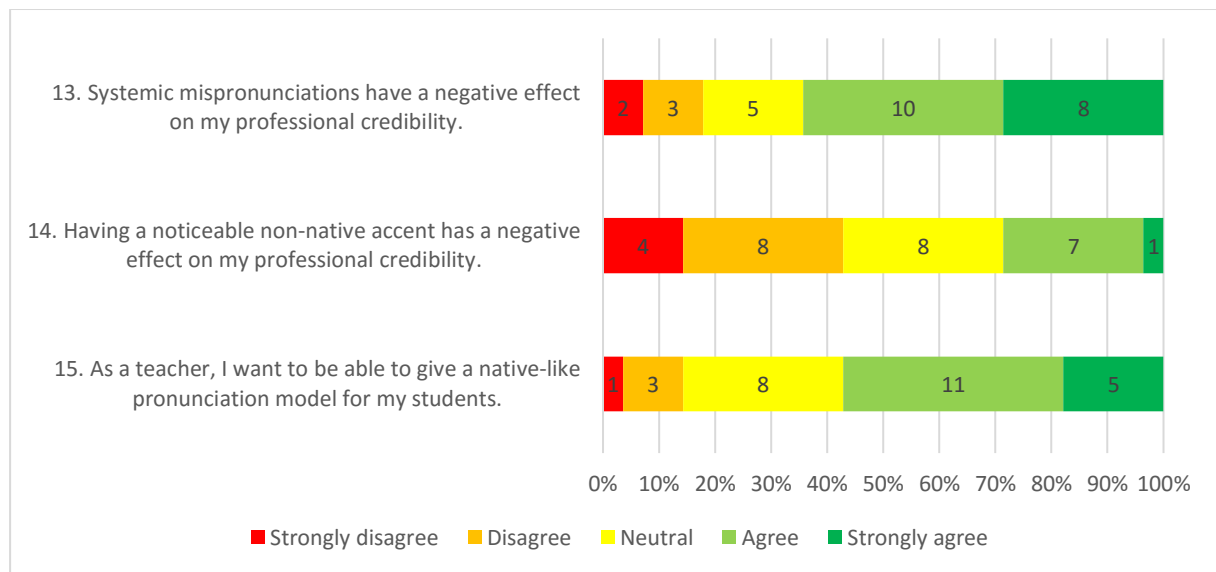
**Figure 1. The responses to questions 8-10 (n=28)**

The first three questions of the survey concerned learning phonemic transcription, and the results are shown in Figure 1. In Question 8, 68% of the respondents felt that learning phonemic transcription has improved their pronunciation at least to some extent, with only four negative responses (14%). Question 9 asked if learning to read phonemic transcription was easy and Question 10 asked the same thing about writing phonemic transcription. As expected, Question 9 yielded a response that is clearly more positive than in Question 10. The average responses were 3.8 and 3.0 respectively, and the percentage of positive responses dropped from 64% to 25%.



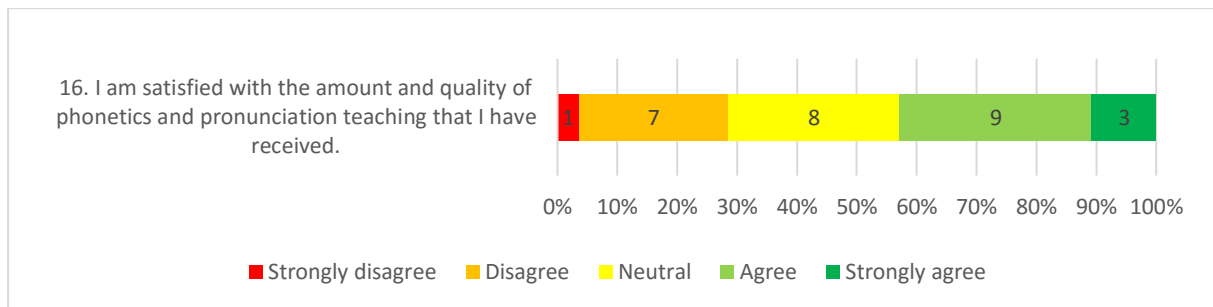
**Figure 2. The responses to questions 11 and 12 (n=28)**

Figure 2 presents the responses to questions 11 and 12. The questions asked if the respondents were going to use phonemic transcription in their future careers and if knowing how to use phonemic transcription is an important skill for an English professional. Only 43% of students responded positively to using phonemic transcription in their future career as a teacher, and a large part of them (39%) were unsure whether to use it or not. Knowing how to read and write phonemic transcription was nevertheless seen as an important skill for a language professional, as the question provided the most positive response of the whole questionnaire with the average response of 4.1 and the percentage of positive responses being as high as 82%.



**Figure 3. The responses to questions 13-15 (n=28)**

There were also three questions about pronunciation, which are presented in Figure 3. Questions 13 and 14 asked whether systematic mispronunciations or a noticeable non-native accent have an adverse effect on the respondents' professional credibility. As expected, there was a significant difference between the responses to these questions, the average responses being 0.9 points apart. 18 students (64%) felt that doing systematic mispronunciations has a negative effect on their professional credibility, whereas only 8 students (29%) felt that a noticeable non-native accent has the same kind of effect. Although having a non-native accent was not seen as a big problem, as many as 16 respondents (57%) wanted (at least to some extent) to be able to give a native-like pronunciation model to their students, as can be seen in Question 15.



**Figure 4. The response to Question 16 (n=28)**

The open-ended questions of the survey were not marked mandatory, but they nevertheless provided quite much information. The students are satisfied with the teaching they have received in university, but only to some extent, as the responses to Question 16 were distributed quite evenly. Room for improvement was especially found in the amount of phonetics and pronunciation teaching, as there is only one course about both subjects in the whole English syllabus. Several respondents noted that there are not enough courses offered about these subjects. The basic courses were regarded as too short and thus, too limited by some. It was noted a couple of times that the courses focused mainly on individual sounds and there was too little time left for suprasegmental features, i.e. stress, rhythm and intonation. The actual quality of the teaching or the competence of the teachers were not criticized. The overall impression is that the amount of phonetics teaching in the university is suitable to give merely the basic understanding of English phonetics and pronunciation.

The last two questions prompted the respondents to tell why they think phonemic transcription is useful and give concrete examples. Some features were mentioned more than once, such as the fact that it is, contrary to spoken language, stable. The fact that it gives students a way to check a word's correct pronunciation on their own was one of the most common answers, and it seems that several respondents had found use of phonemic transcription in their everyday life in university. It also gives a way to break the word into smaller segments, which is especially useful with long and/or difficult words. By doing this, the students gained confidence in pronunciation, which was seen especially special by one respondent because it reduces language anxiety. However, it was also noted that relying too much on phonemic transcription can overcomplicate things and shift the focus away from more important issues, i.e. speaking and getting the message across. The respondents thought that phonemic transcription can help students to forget about the confusing spelling system of English and notice the place of word stress, which can vary in English but not in Finnish. In the examples of how phonemic

transcription has helped the respondents, the stability and concreteness of phonemic transcription were again mentioned. It has also helped two respondents to discover the existence of the neutral vowel sound /ə/. One respondent was not even aware of the voiced palatoalveolar sibilant /ʒ/ before taking the courses in university—he or she had confused it with the voiced alveolar sibilant /z/.

## 5 DISCUSSION

When looking at Questions 9 and 10, it's clear that learning to read phonemic transcription is easier than learning to write it, which was one of the hypotheses of the study. It is a general rule that comprehension is always easier than production, and phonemic transcription does not make an exception. Because reading phonemic transcription was seen relatively easy and learning it was regarded as useful, it clearly is worth teaching in university. However, in the open-ended questions, it was mentioned that very little time was spent on transcribing words and therefore the students did not become very skilled in producing transcription. This, in addition to the very neutral response to Question 10, suggests that the producing transcriptions is significantly harder and needs more time to master. Overall, questions related to the usefulness and difficulty of phonemic transcription as a teaching method were responded to more negatively than in Lintunen's (2004) study. This could be explained by the differences in the education between Jyväskylä and Turku. Especially the fact that Lintunen himself taught pronunciation in Turku and is particularly interested in teaching pronunciation (P. Lintunen, personal communication, 24.3.2017) can affect this. It might also depend on the way that the survey was conducted, as the students might be prone to answering more positively to the questionnaire if it is their phonetics and pronunciation teacher to whom they are answering, as was the case in Lintunen's study.

There was a rather large difference (0.8 points) in the responses to questions 14 and 15, which is surprising. Although the respondents were doubtful about a foreign accent having a negative effect on their professional credibility, they nevertheless were quite eager to be able to give a native-like pronunciation model to their pupils. First, it is quite certain that having a foreign accent has a negative effect on a teacher's professional credibility, and to anybody's professional credibility for that matter. Morris-Wilson (2004, p. 14) pointed out that having a Finnish accent when speaking English makes you seem less educated and intelligent. In addition, a very recent

study by Lintunen, Mäkilähde & Peltola (2017) suggests that students do not want to get feedback about their pronunciation from a teacher that (in their opinion) cannot pronounce as well as the students. This kind of situation would of course be very rare for a teacher, but it gives an example of how severely pronunciation can affect a teacher's professional credibility. Even systematic mispronunciations were regarded as definitely not harmful for a teacher's professional credibility by two people, which was surprising. Another three people were slightly doubtful about the issue. Making no mistakes in pronunciation is unarguably better than making systematic mistakes, and it is very likely that giving a skilful impression of oneself gives a boost to one's professional credibility. The results would probably have been different if the questions were formulated the another way around, e.g. "Having a native-like pronunciation improves my professional credibility" and "Having an error-free pronunciation improves my professional credibility." These are claims that fewer people would argue against, because this way accurate and/or native-like pronunciation is easier to see as a "bonus" ability that is not necessary, whereas the way that the questions were formulated in the questionnaire slightly suggests that not having a perfect and native-like pronunciation prevents one from being a credible English teacher, which results in a more negative response.

It would be interesting to know the reason for the big difference in the responses to these questions, because it suggests that there are other (and rather big) motivators for learning pronunciation besides professional credibility. One reason for the underrating of pronunciation could be that language teaching has abandoned native-level pronunciation as a goal because it requires an unreasonable amount of time and practice. Instead, language teachers of today are concentrating on achieving intelligibility (Levis 2005). This may lead to the false assumption that having a foreign accent does not matter, which is not true, as a foreign accent can have an adverse effect on one's job opportunities (Munro & Derwing 1995, p. 74) and give a less competent and hard-working impression (Morris-Wilson 2004, p. 14). As Levis (2005, p. 370) has noted, pronunciation teaching and learning is still affected by the now outdated Nativeness Principle, which is in line with the findings of this study, because the respondents (who are both learners and future teachers of EFL) value native-like pronunciation despite the well-known fact that it is very often out of a L2 learner's reach. All things considered, it seems that phonemic transcription is worth teaching. It is not too hard to learn, it is beneficial in learning pronunciation for most students and it is a skill that an English professional needs to have. Nevertheless, many respondents were uncertain about using phonemic transcription as a teaching method in their future careers. The reason for this could be that it requires some time

to internalize the phonetic alphabet and its conventions, whereas the traditional listen-and-repeat method requires practically no prior teaching at all. As it was mentioned in the open-ended questions, phonemic transcription can easily get younger students confused, because they are just in the process of getting familiar with a new language and its orthography (and, e.g. in Finland, even their native language's conventions and orthography), and learning yet another "spelling" system can be too much to take for them at that point.

Almost everything that the author of this study found helpful when learning phonemic transcription was mentioned in the open-ended questions. One of the biggest benefits of phonemic transcription is that it is regarded as more concrete than spoken language and aural models. It is very curious, because phonemic transcription is, by definition, merely an abstraction of real spoken language (Lintunen 2004, p. 13), and actually not concrete at all. One respondent mentioned that phonemic transcription is stable, which could be thing that the respondents meant with concreteness. As every person has their own way of pronouncing English, it can be difficult to learn pronunciation with the help of aural models, because they vary so much. The concreteness could also mean the fact that the untrained ear can pick up a word's pronunciation incorrectly, whereas phonemic transcription is unambiguous in that sense. As one respondent mentioned, phonemic transcription enriches pronunciation teaching by introducing written material to support the oral instruction and practice, thus making the teaching multimodal.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

The present study aimed to find out if university students think that phonemic transcription is worth learning and if they are going to use it in their teaching in the future. In addition, it was intended to determine their satisfaction in the pronunciation teaching they have received and their views about the importance of good pronunciation. Taking everything into account, it seems that phonemic transcription has its place in language teaching. It is especially important in university, because whereas knowing phonemic transcription is only a tool for learning for every EFL learner, it is much more for an aspiring English teacher: it is a tool for teaching and it is regarded as an essential skill for a language professional. It allows English teachers to teach pronunciation in an unambiguous way, given the stable nature of phonemic transcription. Focusing on individual sounds and stress is easier when one has a visual aid to support the



teaching. Some sounds, such as the schwa, would be impossible to refer to without using phonemic transcription (Rogerson-Revell 2011, p. 243). Although it might take some time to obtain a good command of phonemic transcription, it is nevertheless justifiable to include it in university-level teaching of English, and as the results indicate, even increase the amount of teaching it. However, many respondents were unsure of using phonemic transcription in their future careers. This is probably because most of us will end up teaching in primary and secondary education, where time is very limited and there is little time for details, where phonemic transcription seems to be at its best.

One of the biggest advantages of this study is that it encompasses both the teacher's and the student's points of view to some extent. Although phonemic transcription was regarded as useful and most respondents thought positively of using phonemic transcription in their teaching careers, most of them have very low experience in teaching, which must be taken into consideration. It is possible that the respondents change their minds about using phonemic transcription after gaining more experience. In Tergujeff's (2013) recent study, phonemic transcription was found to be an unpopular teaching method, and it would be surprising that the trend would have turned around in five years, despite the new national curricula that emphasize pronunciation teaching. Other factors that reduce the reliability of the study are the low number of respondents, and the fact that the study probably attracted people who are more interested in phonemic transcription than the average university student. Especially the latter would distort the results, making phonemic transcription seem more favourable than it actually is.

The most interesting question that rose during this study is what motivates people to aim at native-like pronunciation. Although the results show that native-like (or with some respondents, even error-free) pronunciation is not essential for a teacher, a large part of the respondents wanted to be able to give a native-like pronunciation model for their students. People still try to achieve a native accent, although it has been long since proven that it is not a reasonable learning goal for most people (Levis 2005, p. 370) nor is it crucial for intelligibility (Munro & Derwing 1994). My assumption is that a native-like accent has some intrinsic value to it - it is regarded as "genuine" and thus "better" than foreign accents, even with a language like English, where the distinction between a native accent and a foreign accent is difficult to make because of dozens of national varieties around the world. E.g. a Nigerian accent would probably sound "foreign" to an Englishman, although it is as native as any British or American accent. Another issue that is left unexplored is how well phonemic transcription works when teaching younger

students. Lintunen (2004) has confirmed that it helps students in higher-level education, whereas Kuutti's (2009) study about fourth-graders did not yield results that were statistically significant. A larger-scale study about younger students is needed in order to find out whether it is worth teaching for beginners or is it just confusing, as some of the respondents suspected.

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## APPENDIX

### Questionnaire

#### Background

1. Is English your major subject?
2. Your age
3. Your gender
4. Your minor subjects (write "none" if you do not have any)
5. How many years have you studied English in university, including the current academic year?
6. How much experience in language teaching do you have? Give the answer in years and/or months. Write "none" if you do not have any.
7. What courses on phonetics and/or phonemic transcription have you taken? Include courses both in and outside your major subject, English. Write "none" if you have not taken any.

#### Likert scale questions

8. Learning phonemic transcription has improved my English pronunciation.
9. Learning to read phonemic transcription was easy for me.
10. Learning to write phonemic transcription was easy for me.
11. I am going to use phonemic transcription as a teaching method in my future career as a teacher.
12. Knowing how to read and write phonemic transcription is an important skill for a teacher or another language professional.
13. Systemic mispronunciations have a negative effect on my professional credibility.
14. Having a noticeable non-native accent has a negative effect on my professional credibility.
15. As a teacher, I want to be able to give a native-like pronunciation model for my students.
16. I am satisfied with the amount and quality of phonetics and pronunciation teaching that I have received.

## Open-ended questions

17. Follow-up question for the previous question: Why? If you can, give examples of what was good and/or what was not.
18. Why do you think that phonemic transcription is/is not beneficial for learning pronunciation?
19. Give one or more concrete examples of the ways that phonemic transcription has helped you in learning English pronunciation. E.g. "Phonemic transcription helped me notice/realize/understand..."