



# The impact of nontransparency of entrance examinations in Japan

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies  
Masashi Negishi

# Overview

- Historical Perspective of University Entrance Examinations in Japan
- English Language Teaching Policy in Japan
- Characteristics of University Entrance Examinations in Japan
- Where does the discourse on entrance exams come from?
- What should we do to achieve beneficial washback?



# The Meiji Era



明治天皇

そのみあとを偲びて

Emperor Meiji - In remembrance of his era -

皇威制夷美治天下圖 松岡春 画

明治天皇御料 御軍服軍靴

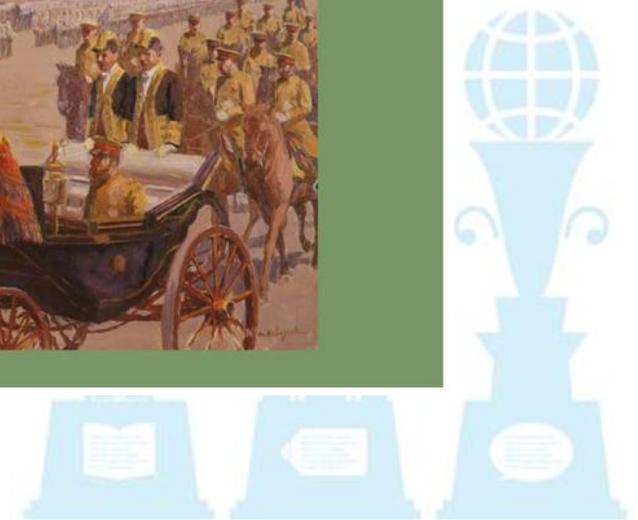
明治天皇御料 御馬具

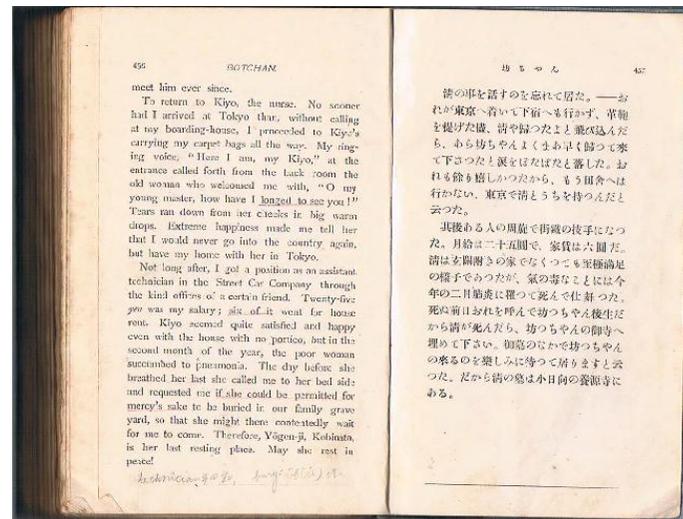
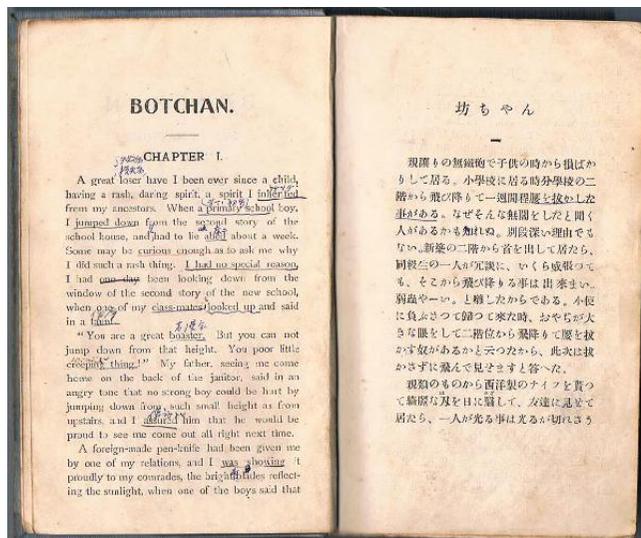
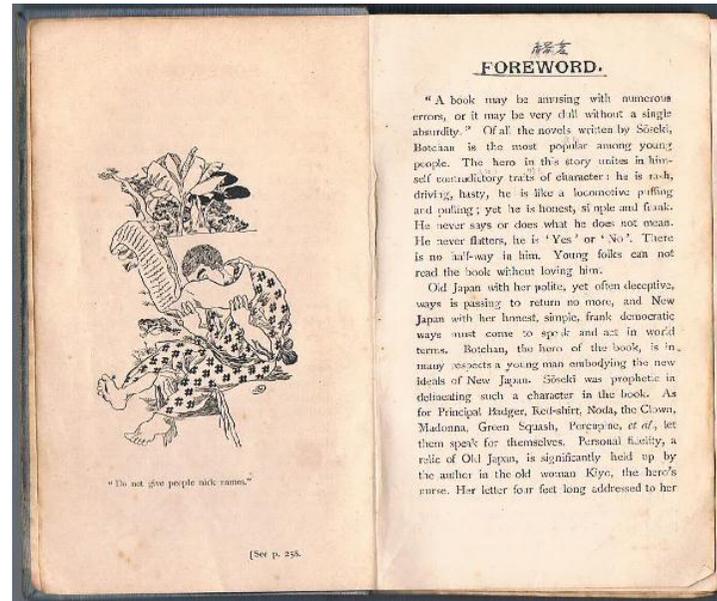
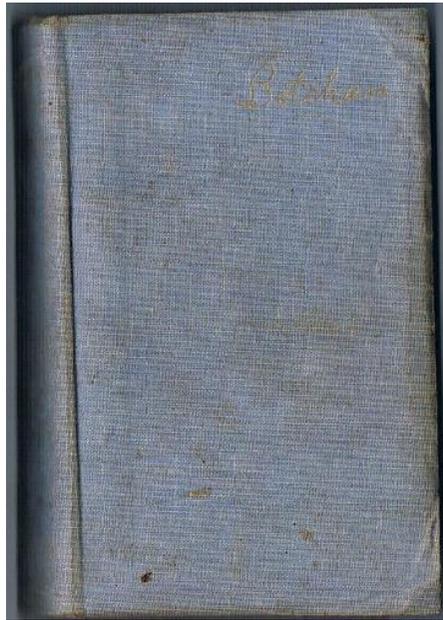
明治天皇御料 御馬具

平成二十六年 六月九日(日) - 九月二十一日(日)

明治神宮文化館 宝物展示室

皇威制夷美治天下圖 松岡春 画

A collage of images related to Emperor Meiji. It includes a museum display of a desk and chairs, a coat on a mannequin, a vase, and a historical painting of a military procession. The text is in Japanese and English.



# Historical Perspective of University Entrance Examinations in Japan



Natsume Soseki





## LANGUAGE SKILLS

2011

Language skills

are not meeting the needs of enterprises  are meeting the needs of enterprises

Ranking	Country	Score
1	SWITZERLAND	8.47
2	LUXEMBOURG	8.06
3	NETHERLANDS	8.00
4	ICELAND	8.06
5	SWEDEN	8.10
6	SINGAPORE	8.00
7	BELGIUM	8.23
8	DENMARK	8.18
9	GREECE	7.89
10	PORTUGAL	7.88
11	ISRAEL	7.87
12	FINLAND	7.47
13	NORWAY	7.41
14	CANADA	7.40
15	INDIA	7.33
16	PHILIPPINES	7.17
17	GERMANY	7.11
18	QATAR	6.81
19	UAE	6.81
20	AUSTRIA	6.80
21	LITHUANIA	6.74
22	HONG KONG	6.67
23	MALAYSIA	6.40
24	SLOVENIA	6.38
25	ROMANIA	6.30
26	POLAND	6.21
27	AUSTRALIA	6.00
27	ESTONIA	6.00
27	TAIWAN	6.00
30	JORDAN	5.44
31	KOREA	5.40
32	NEW ZEALAND	5.18
33	CROATIA	5.17
34	SLOVAK REPUBLIC	5.16
35	CZECH REPUBLIC	5.16
36	IRELAND	5.14
37	BULGARIA	5.12
38	TURKEY	5.08
39	ARGENTINA	5.05
40	SOUTH AFRICA	5.01
41	CHINA MAINLAND	4.77
42	INDONESIA	4.68
43	THAILAND	4.18
44	KAZAKHSTAN	4.13
45	UKRAINE	4.10
46	USA	4.15
47	MEXICO	4.09
48	RUSSIA	3.83
49	ITALY	3.73
50	CHILE	3.72
51	UNITED KINGDOM	3.44
52	VENEZUELA	3.48
53	BRAZIL	3.17
54	PERU	3.18
55	SPAIN	3.18
56	HUNGARY	3.15
57	COLOMBIA	3.12
58	JAPAN	3.01
59	FRANCE	2.93

Source: IMD WORLD COMPETITIVENESS YEARBOOK 2011



31	KOREA		5.49
32	NEW ZEALAND		5.59
33	CROATIA		5.67
34	SLOVAK REPUBLIC		5.76
35	CZECH REPUBLIC		5.16
36	IRELAND		5.14
37	BULGARIA		5.12
38	TURKEY		5.09
39	ARGENTINA		5.05
40	SOUTH AFRICA		5.01
41	CHINA MAINLAND		4.77
42	INDONESIA		4.49
43	THAILAND		4.38
44	KAZAKHISTAN		4.33
45	UKRAINE		4.59
46	USA		4.25
47	MEXICO		4.99
48	RUSSIA		3.83
49	ITALY		3.73
50	CHILE		3.72
51	UNITED KINGDOM		3.46
52	VENEZUELA		3.48
53	BRAZIL		3.37
54	PERU		3.28
55	SPAIN		3.19
56	HUNGARY		3.15
57	COLOMBIA		3.12
58	JAPAN		3.01
59	FRANCE		2.91



# ASIA

R L S W T

**2013 TOEFL  
iBT Total and  
Section Score  
Means — All  
Examinees,  
Classified by  
Geographic  
Region and  
Native  
Country**

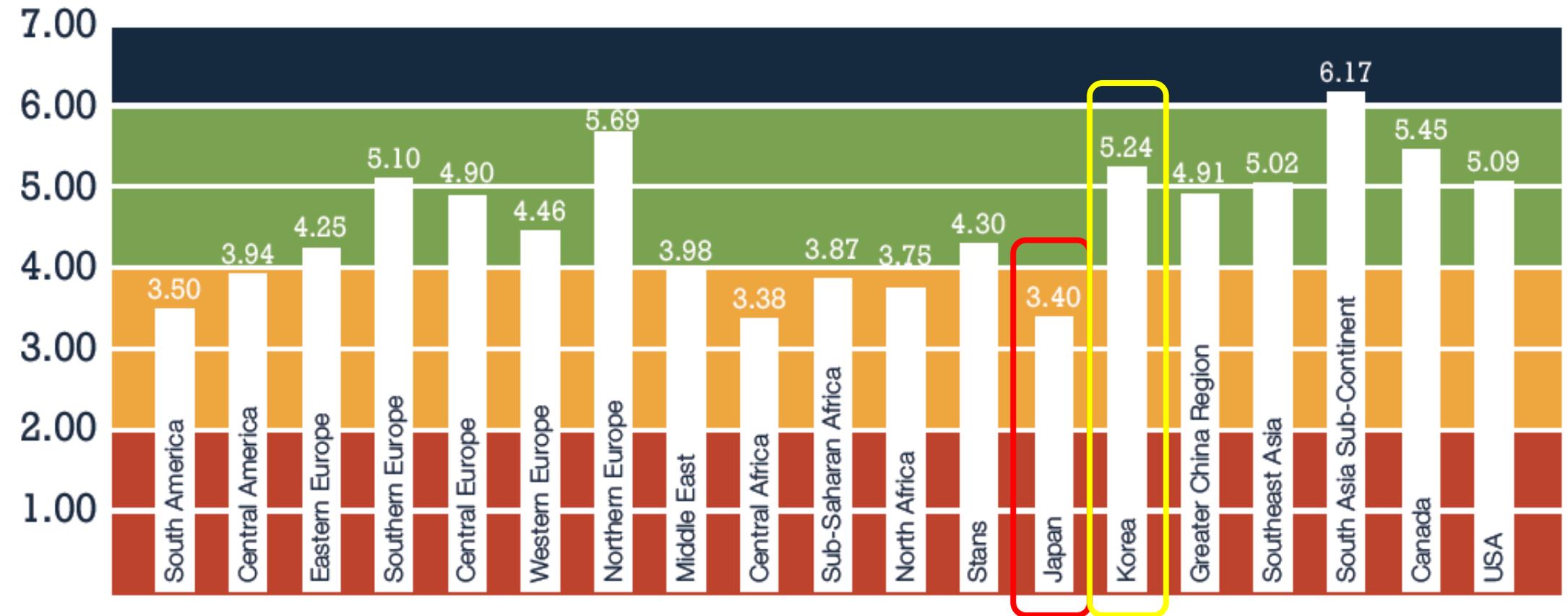
Afghanistan	15	16	21	19	71
Azerbaijan	18	19	20	20	78
Bangladesh	20	21	21	22	84
Bhutan	17	18	22	21	79
Brunei Darussalam	*	*	*	*	*
Cambodia	15	16	19	19	69
China	20	18	19	20	77
Christmas Island	*	*	*	*	*
Cocos (Keeling) Islands	*	*	*	*	*
Hong Kong	19	21	21	22	83
India	22	23	23	23	91
Indonesia	20	21	20	21	82
Japan	18	17	17	18	70
Kazakhstan	18	20	22	20	80
Korea, Democratic People's Republic of	20	20	20	21	82
Korea, Republic of	22	21	21	22	85
Kyrgyzstan	17	19	21	20	76
Lao, People's Democratic Republic	15	16	20	18	68
Macao	18	18	19	20	76
Malaysia	22	23	22	23	89
Maldives	*	*	*	*	*
Mongolia	16	18	19	18	70
Myanmar	18	19	20	21	79
Nepal	20	20	21	21	83
Pakistan	21	22	24	23	90
Philippines	21	22	24	23	89
Singapore	24	25	24	25	98
Sri Lanka	20	21	22	21	85
Taiwan	20	20	20	20	79
Tajikistan	14	16	20	17	68
Thailand	18	19	19	20	76
Timor-Leste	12	12	19	18	62
Turkmenistan	16	18	20	19	74
Uzbekistan	18	19	21	20	79
Vietnam	19	19	19	21	78



# The Business English Index 2012 Report

Analyzing the Trends of Global Readiness  
for Effective 21<sup>st</sup> -Century Communication

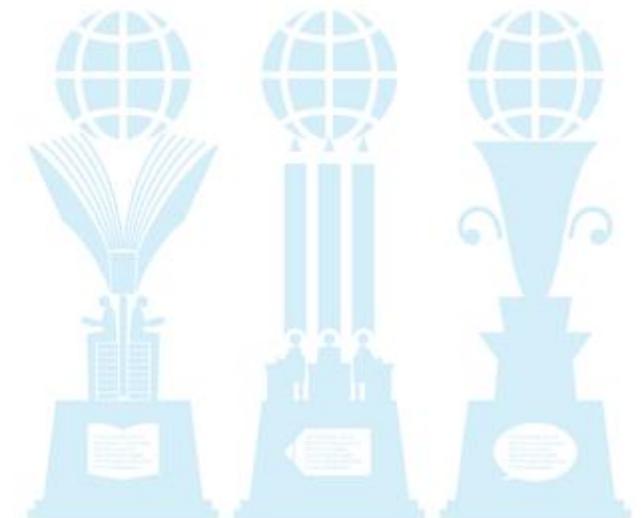
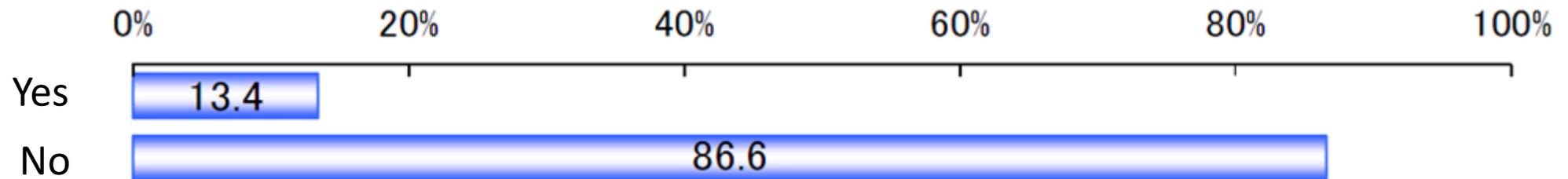
## BEI BY REGION



GlobalEnglish *white paper*

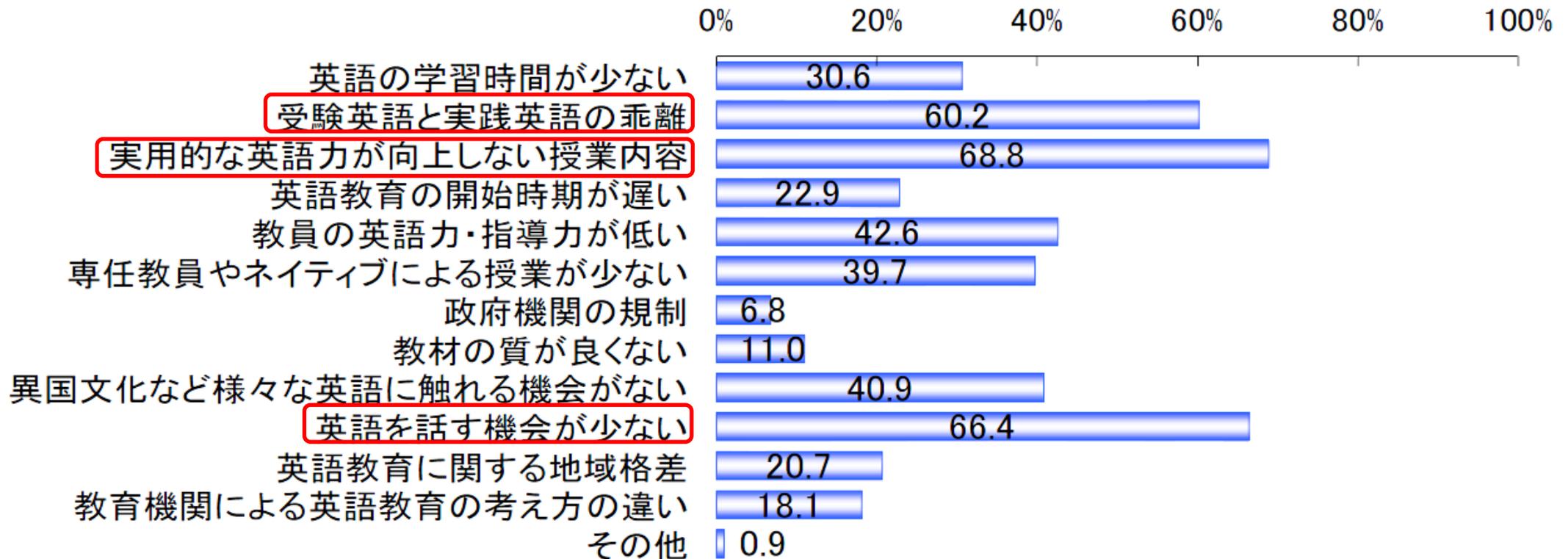
# Survey by Rakuten Research

- Are you satisfied with your English education?



# What are Japanese people dissatisfied with?

◇日本の英語教育への不満点 (n = 866) 複数選択 単位：%



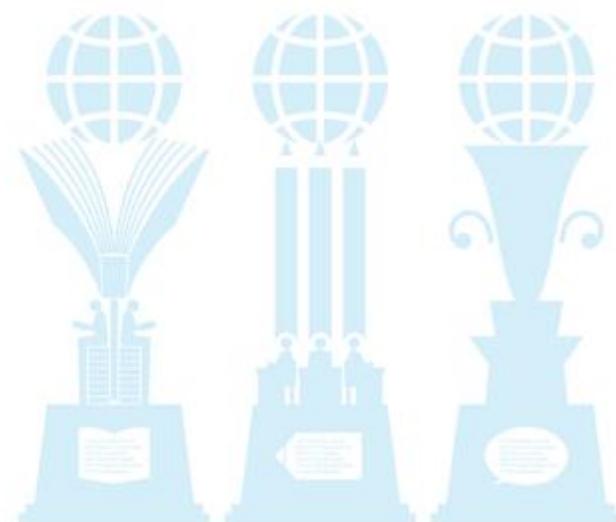
# Historical Perspective of University Entrance Examinations in Japan

- 1873: Kaisei-gakko administered the first entrance exam.
  - dictation, conversation, and composition
- Performance tests such as oral translation began to fade out
- Tests of written translation from English to Japanese and from Japanese to English and dictation became prevalent
- The early 20<sup>th</sup> century: entrance exams settled down to tests of translation and grammar



# Historical Perspective of University Entrance Examinations in Japan

- 1979: the start of the Joint First Stage Achievement
- 1988: the start of the National Center Test
- 2006: the introduction of Listening into the National Center Test



# A List of Major Reform Plans of English Language Teaching in Japan

year	Reform plans
1982	Abolition of authorised English grammar textbooks
1989	First Reference to “communication” in the Course of Study, e.g. “attitude to actively engage in communication”
1998	Reference to “practical communicative competence” in the Course of Study
2003-2007	Five-year compulsory in-service training for 60,000 public secondary school English teachers: a part of “an Action Plan to Cultivate Japanese with English Abilities”
2002-2009	Designation of 168 Super English Language High Schools (SELHi)
2006	<b>Introduction of listening into the English examination of the National Center for University Entrance Examinations</b> The publication of the Course of Study, which emphasises well balanced teaching of 4 skills (listening / speaking / reading / writing) in middle school, and which stipulates English classes should be conducted principally in English in high schools.
2009	The introduction of foreign language activities into primary schools (Primary grades 5&6), with teaching centred on listening & speaking.

year	Reform plans
	The announcement of Five Proposals and Specific Measures for Developing Proficiency in English for International Communication Proposal 1. Assessing students’ ability in English and validating the attainment levels required of students Proposal 2. Promoting students’ awareness of necessity of English in the global society, and stimulating motivation for English learning Proposal 3. Providing students with more opportunities to use English through effective utilization of ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers), ICT and other means Proposal 4. Reinforcement of English skills and pedagogical skills of English teachers/Strategic improvement of English education at the level of schools and communities <b>Proposal 5. Modification of university entrance exams toward global society</b>
2011	
2013	The publication of <i>the Guidebook for the setting of the attainment target of the foreign language education for each middle and high school in the form of “CAN-DO list”</i>
2013	The release of “English Education Reform Plan corresponding to Globalization”
2014	Proposal by the Council of advisors on English Language Education



# Characteristics of University Entrance Examinations in Japan

- English language teaching in East Asia:  
**exam-driven**
- University Entrance Examinations in Japan
  - the great **diversity** of English exams
  - the high **complexity** of the university entrance exam system
- The extreme diversity of the current university entrance exams **weakens the direct impact** of each exam to the test takers.



# Structures of National University Entrance Examinations in Japan

Univ. of Tokyo	Univ. of Kyoto	TUFS
R, L, W	R, W	R, L, W
1 (A) reading comprehension summary in Japanese	1 translation (E→J)	1 reading comprehension Q&A in Japanese
1 (B) reading comprehension gap filling	2 translation (E→J)	2 reading gap filling
2 (A) writing conversation (50-70 wds)	3 translation (J→E)	3 reading sentence insertion
2 (B) essay writing (50-70 wds)		4 listening (multiple-choice)
3 (A) listening comprehension lecture		5 listening (multiple-choice)
3 (B) listening comprehension interview		6 (1) listening+ summary (150-200 wds)
3 (C) listening comprehension conversation		6(2) essay writing (200 wds)
4 (A) cloze-elide		
4 (B) translation (E→J)		
5 reading comprehension	Copyright © Masashi Negishi 2014	

# Structures of Private University Entrance Examinations in Japan

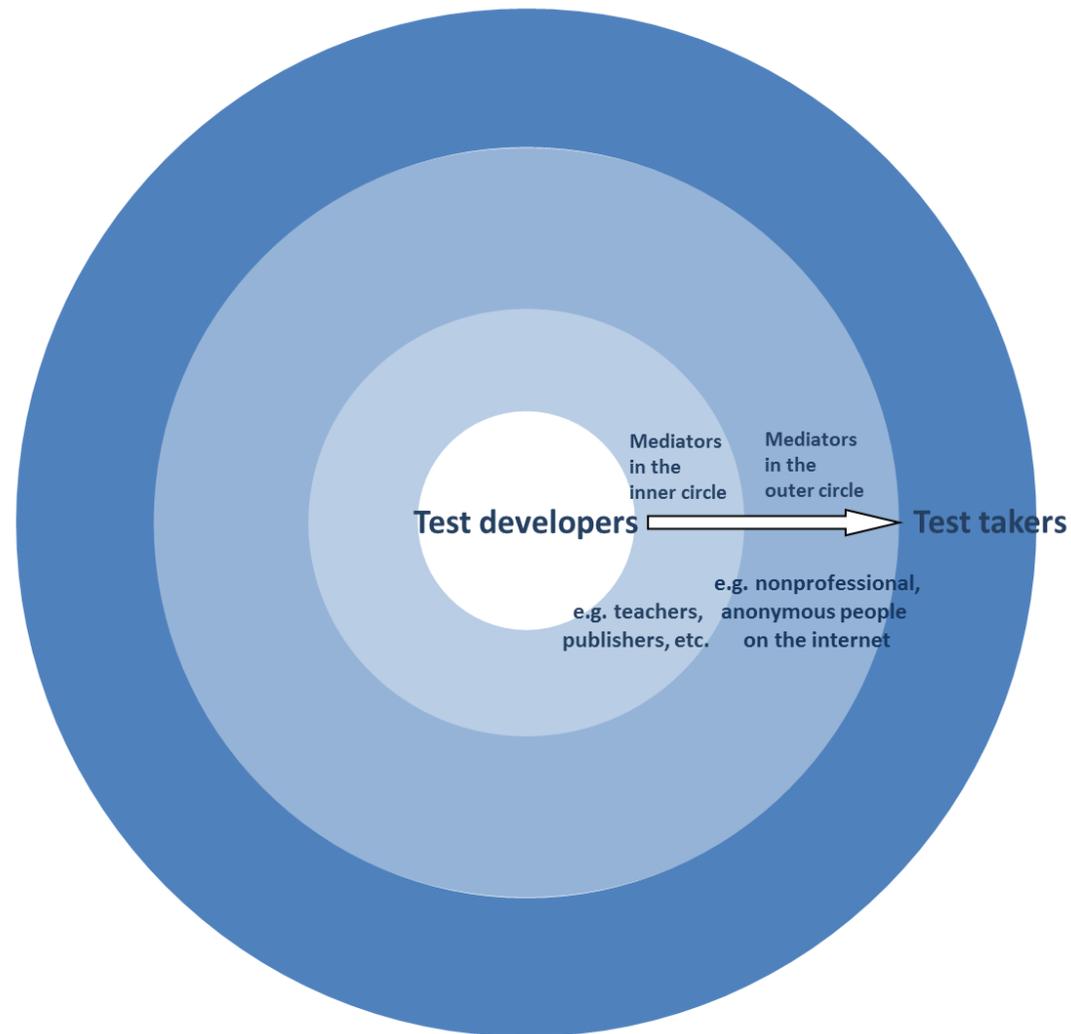
Keio University Faculty of Letters	Waseda University School of Education	Sophia University Faculty of Foreign Studies (1 <sup>st</sup> stage exam)
R, W	R, G, V	R, G, V
one reading passage 5 types of questions	1 reading passages: 5 types of questions (multiple-choice)	1 reading: sentence insertion (multiple-choice)
(I)(V)(VI) translation (E→J)	2 reading passages: 4 types of questions (multiple-choice)	2 (written) conversation: select a response (multiple-choice)
(IX) translation (J→E)	3 reading passages: 5 types of questions (multiple-choice)	3 Reading: sentence insertion + QA (multiple-choice)
(IV)(VIII) explanation in J	4 reading passages: 5 types of questions (multiple-choice)	4 Reading: gap filling (multiple-choice)
(III)(VII) gap filling	5 (written) conversation: 2 types of questions (multiple-choice)	5 Reading: Q&A in Japanese (multiple-choice)
(II) paraphrase		6 error detection (multiple-choice)
		7 rearrangement (multiple-choice)
		8 Vocabulary: gap-filling (multiple-choice)

# Characteristics of University Entrance Examinations in Japan

- Japanese university candidates **can access past papers** of the university entrance exams
- The problem is they are **too abundant and too diverse** to generalize.
- The **process** of the decision making regarding which university to apply for is very **complicated**.



# Mediators between the Test Developers and Test Takers



# An Example of This Year's Mock Test

## R, W, L, G

1

reading comprehension: multiple-choice Q&A, gap filling, translation (E→J)

2

reading comprehension: translation (E→J), multiple-choice gap filling

3 (A)

essay writing (50-70 wds)

3 (B)

translation (J→E)

4

grammar + usage

5 (A)

listening comprehension (monologue): multiple-choice Q&A

5 (B)

listening comprehension (dialogue): multiple-choice Q&A



# Another Example of What's Happening in the Inner Circle

- Kanatani (2009)
- Iijima (2012)

Constructions	447 entrance exams	100 million words corpus
“not so much as ...”	0	6
“scarcely (hardly) ... when ...”	0	2



# Where does the discourse on entrance exams come from?

- Test specs “provide an efficient **generative blueprint** by which many similar instances of the same assessment task can be generated”. -Davidson & Lynch (2008)
- Although candidates for Japanese university entrance exams may be able to access past papers, they do **not access the test specs.**



# Test Specifications

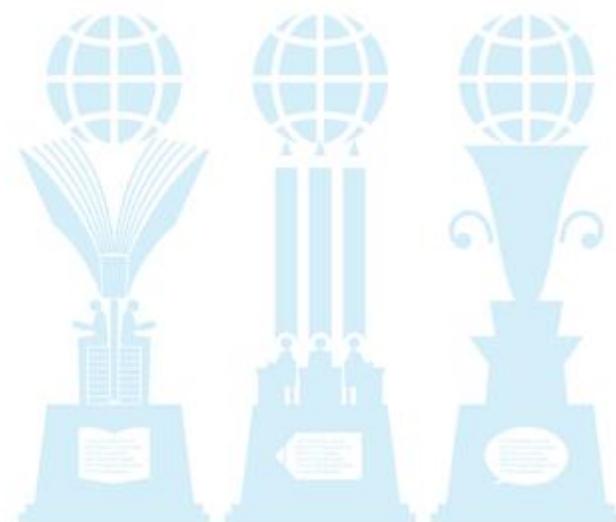
1. The tests do “not have a test specification” in the first place.
2. The tests “merely provide general labels for the skill being tested, along with the number of items or tasks per skill and a brief description of the item/task format”.
3. The specifications are in the head of item writers.
4. The tests have full specifications in the forms available to every item writer.

-Davidson & Lynch (2008)



# What should We Do to Achieve Beneficial Washback?

- Release information regarding the exams
- Davidson (2013) defines the 'releasability' of language test specifications (specs) as the degree to which they are shared outside of the test development team.



# What should We Do to Achieve Beneficial Washback?

- Two parallel versions of specs – an internal-version and **a releasable version**
- “... production of a releasable version of a test spec involves careful editing of the internal spec to remove details that affect study for the test, test security, and other considerations that might alter the test’s validity”.  
-Davidson (2013; 11)



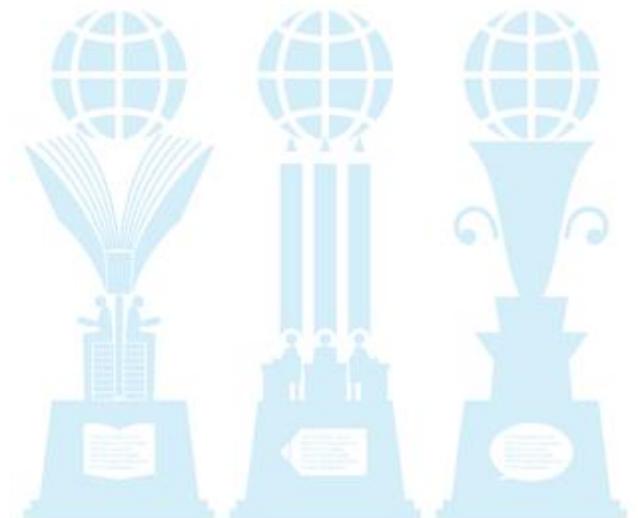
# Hughes (2003)

“Before we decide that we cannot afford to test in a way that will promote beneficial backwash, we have to ask ourselves a question: What will be the cost of not achieving beneficial backwash? When we compare the cost of the test with the waste of effort and time on the part of teachers and students in activities quite inappropriate to their true learning goals (and in some circumstances, with the potential loss to the national economy of not having more people competent in foreign languages), we are likely to decide that we cannot afford not to introduce a test with a powerful beneficial backwash effect.”



# What should We Do to Achieve Beneficial Washback?

- Release
  - test specifications (a releasable version)
  - guiding language
  - sampling items
  
- Can we ...?



Copyrighted Material

# COURAGE

Bernard Waber



Copyrighted Material

# COURAGE

Bernard Waber



There are many kinds of courage.

Awesome kinds.

And everyday kinds.

Still, courage is courage—whatever kind.

Courage is two candy bars and saving one for tomorrow.

Courage is being the first to make up after an argument.



Copyrighted Material

# COURAGE

Bernard Waber



Courage is the bottom of the ninth, tie score, two outs, bases loaded, and your turn to bat.

Courage is starting over.

Courage is sometimes having to say goodbye.

Courage is holding on to your dreams.

Courage is breaking bad habits.



For me;  
Courage is making tests transparent  
to test takers  
in order to eliminate unfounded guesses

