

# **To What Degree can Grammar-Translation Classroom Cope With Contemporary College-Entrance English Examinations?**

## **—Senior High School English Classroom Reform Project Part1—**

Keyword : entrance examination, teaching style, grammar translation method

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### **1. The aim of the research**

It has been long since Japanese English education was required to enhance students' English skills so that they can actually communicate with others in English. However, despite students' wishes and teachers' efforts, the grammar translation method in regular English classes and workbook exercises in supplementary classes have been still mainly used in the majority of high schools.

Some teachers, aware of the problem, have warned that high school English education is not just preparing students for college entrance examinations. They have consistently made efforts to bring it back onto the right track, i.e. to let students develop their personalities, communication skills, and international viewpoints and understand other cultures through English classes. However, against their efforts, there has been a widespread myth that teachers have no choice but to use the grammar translation method for students in order to let them go to the university of their choice since college entrance examinations are still deeply related to the method. Although such belief does not always have supportive evidence, it has been widespread among high school teachers and students. In order to clear the myth and realize more sensible and justifiable English classes in senior high schools, especially in competitive high schools where most of the students aim to enter good universities, we believe that the followings should be examined in terms of: 1) whether or not the authentic-goaled English education are capable of preparing students for college entrance examinations 2) whether the myth mentioned above is really grounded on the state of art of the latest English exam questions given in college entrance examinations.

The purpose of this research is to investigate whether “the belief” that the grammar translation method is the most effective for entrance exam preparation is true or not. For that purpose, seven high school teachers, seven college teachers, and two graduate students formed a project group and have analyzed the questions of entrance examinations conducted by thirty-three public and private universities nationwide in Japan in 2008 and 2009. Then they have researched the percentage of the questions that can be best answered through the grammar translation method classroom. This research, however, does not discuss what ideal entrance examinations are or judge which question types are better.

## 2. Research method

### 2.1 The background of the subjects

The project group chose well-known universities in regions all over Japan whose entrance examinations were available for the research. In total thirty-three universities including nine national and twenty-four private universities were chosen as follows: Hokkaido Univ., Tohoku Univ., Tokyo Univ., Hitotsubashi Univ., Nagoya Univ., Kyoto Univ., Osaka Univ., Kyusyu Univ., Tokyo Institute of Technology., Sophia Univ., Waseda Univ., Keio Univ., Meiji Univ., Rikkyo Univ., Aoyama Gakuin Univ., Chuo Univ., Hosei Univ., Nihon Univ., Toyo Univ., Komazawa Univ., Sensyu Univ., Nanzan Univ., Cyukyo Univ., Meijyo Univ., Aichi Univ., Kansai Univ., Kwansei Gakuin Univ., Ritsumeikan Univ., Doshisya Univ., Kyoto Sangyo Univ., Kinki Univ., Konan Univ., and Ryukoku Univ. National universities usually give their entrance examinations twice in a year. The first exam is held in the middle of January with the greater numbers of admittance and the second one is given in the middle of March. This project group analyzed the entrance examinations of the national universities in the first term. Regarding private universities, the group analyzed examinations of the department of each university with the highest quota of students in principle. If the universities had both art and science departments, two examinations from both departments of which had the highest enrollment were analyzed respectively. Totally ninety-one college entrance examinations conducted in 2008 and 2009 were analyzed in this research.

### 2.2 Analyzed Item

Figure 1 is the analysis sheet used for the research. First, the analysis items in the class ‘General’ show the basic information of the examination questions analyzed, such as the serial number among the universities analyzed, the university’s name, the department’s name, the year in which the examination was given, the examination type, the test time allotment, and the question section number.

General						Readability				Category			Questions									
Serial number	University	Department	Year	Examination type	Test time allotment	Question section number	Number of words	Number of paragraphs	Flesch Reading Ease	Flesch- Kincaid Grade Level	Style	Category	Topic	Question number	Test direction	Range of reference	Question type	Language for answering	Ways of answering	Number of multiple choice items/assigned word numbers	A type	B type

Figure 1. analysis sheet

Second, the items in the class ‘Readability’ show the number of words in English sentences in each question, the number of paragraphs (or turns in conversations) and the reading ease and Kincaid Grade Level calculated by Flesch- Readability formula<sup>1)</sup>. In the Reading ease scale, the number closer to 100 is easy to read and the number under 60 is considered difficult. Kincaid Grade Level shows which grade of the American educational system

<sup>1)</sup> Reading Ease=206.835 – (1.015×α) – (84.6×β), (α=average words per sentence, β=average syllables per word) For further information, refer to Kiyokawa (2000) .

one has to be in order to comprehend the English passages in the question.

Third, the three items in the class 'Category of the Content' are the Style, the Field, and the topic of the Text. The text style is classified into two categories; descriptive style mainly describing facts and personal opinion style mainly describing personal opinions. The examples of the class 'Field of the Text' refer to the genre of the text such as science, culture, history, society...and so on. These items are used in order to categorize the type of English passages and conversations in the analyzed examinations.

"Questions" refers to the detailed question types of each exam question. For example, "test direction," refers to which language is used for giving test directions. The "range of reference" indicates the range of words, sentences or paragraphs as well as figures and tables that examinees are required to read to answer a given question. "Question Types" are classified into 19 categories as follows:

- English-Japanese translation,
- partial English-Japanese translation
- Japanese-English translation
- creative writing
- summarizing
- task solving
- grammar and usage
- synonyms
- word meanings
- error correcting
- paraphrasing
- word-sorting
- filling in the blanks
- putting paragraphs in the correct order, or filling in missing paragraphs
- listening comprehension
- pronunciation
- say true or false
- telling reference relationship
- checking comprehension of the passage

"Language for Answering" refers to which language the test-takers are required to use for answering the question. "Ways of Answering" refers to how test takers answer the questions, such as filling in the blanks,

multiple-choice, copying from the text, etc. “The number of multiple choice items/ assigned word numbers” refers to of how many choices the examinee has to choose the answer, how many words examinees can spare for answering the question.

Finally, and most importantly, comes the classification on whether the exam task belongs to A type or B type.

### 2.3 The definition of A-type questions and examples

In this research, questions compatible with grammar-translation style of teaching are defined as A-type for convenience sake. The A type questions consist of English-Japanese translation, sentence or word paraphrasing, word-sorting, Japanese-English translation, choosing words with similar meanings, true-false questions for short sentences, questions about the pronunciations of isolated words without contexts, and grammatical questions about short, isolated sentences. In such questions, test takers are not required to understand a long passage. Below are some examples of the A type questions given in college entrance examinations. The test directions in Japanese are translated into English in the parentheses by the present author):

#### ① English-Japanese translation

次の英文 (B)を読み、下線部の意味を日本語で表しなさい。(Read Passage (B) and translate it into Japanese.)

(B) How we handle our own feelings of impatience, hostility, and anger is a far more powerful example to our children than what we tell them to do with theirs. We don't want to impose our black moods on our children, but neither do we want to pretend that our angry feelings don't exist. In any case, we may as well be honest, for even when we try to cover up our anger, our children sense how we feel.

[2008 年度 大阪大学 大問 1 番 B]

#### ② Japanese-English translation

次の日本語(a)と(b)を英語に訳しなさい。(Translate Japanese sentences (A) and (B) into English.)

- (a) 言うまでもなく、ある人にはささいだと思われることが別の人にはきわめて重大なことになり得る。  
(b) 昨夜おそくお婆の家の近くで火事があったので、今朝電話で安否をたずねた。

[2009 年度中央大学 2/12, センター併用方式・一般 法 大問 2]

#### ③ Word-sorting

A. 次の日本語(1, 2)に相当する意味になるように、それぞれ以下(a~f)の語群を並べ替えて正しい英文を完成させたとき、並べ替えた語群の最初から 2 番目と 6 番目にくる語の記号をマークしなさい。[Put the words (a~f) in the correct order to match the sentence (1) and mark the answer sheet in the space for the second and sixth words.]

- (1) 彼には、日本の新しい風習に順応することが、非常に難しいことだとわかった。(He found it very difficult to adapt himself to the new customs in Japan.)

He found it very difficult to ( a. himself b. the c. customs d. adapt e. to f. new ) in Japan.

\*(2) is omitted.

[2008 年度 関西学院大学 2/3, A方式(3科目型) 文 理工 大問 5 番 A]

## ④Choosing words with similar meanings

次の下線部の語句に最も近い意味を持つものを，ア～エの中からそれぞれ1つ選び，その記号を解答欄に書きなさい。  
(Choose the best word that is the closet in meaning from among ア～エ and write the Japanese kana alphabet in the answer sheet.)

(1) How could you stand by him after he was found guilty?

ア. present イ. rear ウ. bring エ. support [2008 年度名城大学 2/1,A(前期日程) F 方式 (都市情報 法学部) 大問 4]

## ⑤Distinguishing pronunciation

下線部の発音が他の三つと異なるものをそれぞれ一つ選び，その番号をマークせよ。(Mark the number whose pronunciation is different from that of other three words.)

47 1. core 2. floor 3. pour 4. secure

[2009 年度 京都産業大学 大問 8]

As shown in the examples, A type questions require translating, working on some language items, and phonetic knowledge within isolated sentences without context. Even when the questions are embedded in a long passage, it is possible for test takers to answer them to some extent without understanding the overall meaning of the passages.

## 2.4 The definition of B-type questions and examples

On the other hand, questions compatible with communicative lessons are defined as B-type. Specifically, they are such questions that fit any of the following definitions.

- (1) Questions that require substantial reading fluency to understand a long passage quickly and answer questions.
- (2) Questions in which test directions are given in English, testing the ability to participate in classes conducted in English.
- (3) Questions that test the ability to make judgments or inferences about the information that is not directly written in the text.
- (4) Questions that test the ability to skim the gist of a long passage in a short time without depending on word-to-word native language translation.
- (5) Questions that test the ability to deeply understand contexts, the organization of a paragraph, and the organization/relation of paragraphs in a passage.
- (6) Questions that test strategic competence such as conversational strategies or reading strategies.
- (7) Questions that require solving some tasks (non-verbal tasks) using English.
- (8) Questions that test writing abilities to express test-takers' opinions in English for communication purposes..

Below are some examples of the B type questions.

⑥ Summary writing or task writing based on the passage provided

**Question A** (The passage about global warming is omitted)

Summarize in English the opposing views about global warming from the passage in a paragraph of up to 70 words.  
You may use words and phrases from the text, but not complete sentences.

**Question B**

In English, write a 70-90 word paragraph answering the following question:

Do you believe you should make changes in your own life due to global warming?

- If yes, explain what changes you feel you should make.
- If no, explain why changes are not necessary.

You may use words and phrases from the text, but not complete sentences.

[2008 年度 北海道大学 前期日程 (全学部) 大問 3]

Question A in the example ⑥ requires test-takers to read a long passage consisting of 680 words (the passage is omitted) first and then summarize it within 70 English words. Furthermore, in Question B, test takers are asked to write their opinions about the passage, following English directions.

⑦ Summarizing in Japanese

次の英文の内容を、70～80 字の日本語に要約せよ。句読点も字数に含める。

(Summarize the passage in 70～80 Japanese letters. Comma and periods should be included in the number of the words.)

One serious question about faces is whether we can find attractive or even pleasant-looking someone of whom we cannot approve. We generally give more weight to moral judgments than to judgments about how people look, or at least most of us do most of the time. So when confronted by a person one has a low moral opinion of, perhaps the best that one can say is that he or she looks nice - and one is likely to add that this is only a surface impression. What we in fact seem to be doing is reading backward, from knowledge of a person's past behavior to evidence of that behavior in his or her face.

We need to be cautious in assuming that outer appearance and inner self have any immediate relation to each other. It is in fact extremely difficult to draw any conclusions we can trust from our judgments of a person's appearance alone, and often, as we gain more knowledge of the person, we can discover how wrong our initial judgments were. During Hitler's rise and early years in power, hardly anyone detected the inhumanity that we now see so clearly in his face. There is nothing necessarily evil about the appearance of a small man with a mustache and exaggerated bodily and wicked political leader in so similar a way that it is impossible to tell them apart.

[2008 年度 東京大学 前期日程 (文科、理科 1～3 類) 大問 1 (A)]

The above example requires test-takers to comprehend a 266-word passage and summarize it within a certain number of Japanese letters.

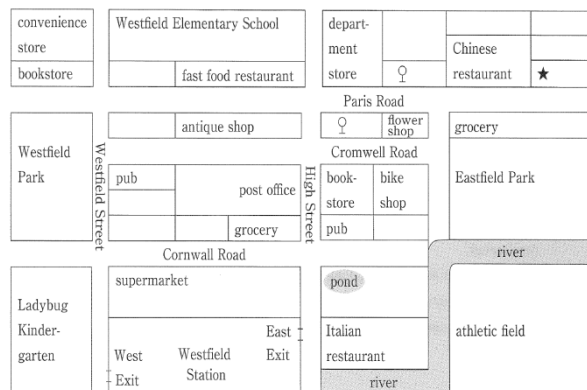
⑧ Task accomplishment

The example ⑧ below requires test-takers to read the English invitation and the street map, understand directions and solve tasks. Although this example appears like information seeking and true-false questions, as a whole it is a kind of tasks because students are asked to understand what the invitation means, and find the destination matching the information and the map.

次の案内文と地図を参考にして、下の 22 ～ 26 の質問に対する答えとして最も適切なものを①～④からそれぞれ一つずつ選びなさい。(Refer to the invitation and map, choose the best answer from among ①～④ to answer the questions 22 ～ 26.)

Dear friends,

You are cordially invited to a party celebrating Sara's birthday. The party will be held at a Chinese restaurant in town. Get off at the train station, and go out the East Exit, where you can see the river to the right. Walk along High Street. After the post office turn right into Cromwell Road. Don't go straight to Paris Road, as there is construction going on at Paris Road and High Street. At the end of Cromwell Road, you will see Eastfield Park. Then, turn left, and walk until you cross Paris Road. The Chinese restaurant is to the right between a bus stop and a bakery. You can't miss it!



22. Which of the following statements is correct about the train station?

- ① The East Exit faces a Chinese restaurant.
- ② The West Exit is in Cornwall Road.
- ③ You cannot see the river from the East Exit.
- ④ The West Exit is closer to Ladybug Kindergarten.

(Questions 23～26 are omitted)

[2009 年度 日本大学 (商学部) 大問 5]

#### ⑨ Understanding the organization of the paragraph

次の英文の空所に入る最もふさわしい表現を、それぞれ、(a)～(d)の中から一つ選び、その記号をマークせよ。

(Choose the best expression for the blank from among (a)～(d) and mark it.)

It's a fact that people judge you by the clothes you wear. So, if you're wearing a T-shirt, when you are taking a job interview, people may think it's not proper. You don't always have to conform, but it's best to dress ( ).

- (a) what you like      (b) according to the situation      (c) like others      (d) by yourself

[2009 年度 中京大学 2/10, 一般(前期日程(B方式)) 一般(前期日程(D方式)) 大問 2]

In the above question, the first sentence is the topic sentence of the paragraph, and the others are its support. If the examinee is familiar with such text organization, it is easy to choose the right words to fill in.

#### ⑩ Testing the knowledge of 'one paragraph one main idea'

This type of questions test examinees' knowledge about the rule of organizing English paragraphs. The first question in the example below is only soluble when the examinee knows that in English paragraph, we have to concentrate on one particular topic, without deviating to another. The second question is soluble when one understands that an English paragraph has one comprehensive topic.

次のそれぞれの問いに答えよ。(Answer the following questions.)

1. 次のパラグラフの中に文脈に合わない文が一つある。その番号を選びマークせよ。

(Choose the number that doesn't match the context. Mark the answer sheet in the space.)

(1) The nation is aging faster than any other society in recent history. (2) Scientists and economic planners have known about this trend for years. (3) However, it is only recently that it has begun to affect the lives of ordinary Japanese. (4) By 2018, the government has estimated, one in four Japanese will be over the age of 65. (5) By that time, a large number of the elderly will be relying on a very small labor force to provide for them. (6) Recently, a Japanese scientist discovered a new medication for living a longer life. (7) More immediately, the traditional Japanese family is decreasing as young people move away from their parents' homes to seek jobs and lives of their own. (8) Meanwhile, the price and commitment of caring for one's aged parents has been escalating steadily. (9) With a shortage of affordable nursing homes and a lack of home-care services, Japan's silver life is beginning to reveal a very threatening cloud.

2. このパラグラフのタイトルとして最も適切なものを(A)～(D)より一つ選び、その記号をマークせよ。

(Choose the best title of the paragraph from among (A)～(D) and mark the answer sheet in the space.)

(A) Important Trends in Japan

(B) The Trend of Japanese Labor

(C) The Future of Elderly People in Japan

(D) The Future of Young Japanese

[2008年度 甲南大学 2/2, A日程 (知能情報 理工学部) 大問 6]

## 2.5 The definition of O-type questions

As stated in the title, the main purpose of this research is to analyze what percentage of questions in college entrance examinations seem compatible with grammar-translation style of teaching. Therefore, the researchers focused on the analysis of A-type and B-type questions which are the opposite of A type. For convenience we have chosen to label the other questions as 'O-type'; those questions that don't seem to belong to either A or B. For time limitations we have so far concentrated on analyzing A-type and B-type, leaving O-type questions to later analysis.

## 3. Results and discussions

Now, the researchers would like to report the quantitative characteristics of the overall analysis. Each researcher was in charge of analyzing examinations of several universities and the authors of this paper double-checked the data. The descriptive statistics of the 91 examinations are shown in Table 1 below. The analysis has revealed the four major trends in contemporary college-entrance English examinations, as described below.

### 3.1 Tendency of assigning greater number of words to process in the examination

As shown in Table 1, the current examination questions have growing tendencies to assign applicants to read fairly large volume of English texts, including test directions. The largest number of words was about 4,000 words given by Science and Engineering department of Waseda University in 2008 and 2009 to be answered in eighty minutes. Benesse (2009) also reports that the amount of English sentences has been increasing in the National Center Test. Both public and private universities surveyed require applicants to read and comprehend a great number of English sentences in a short time in the current college entrance examinations. If applicants tried



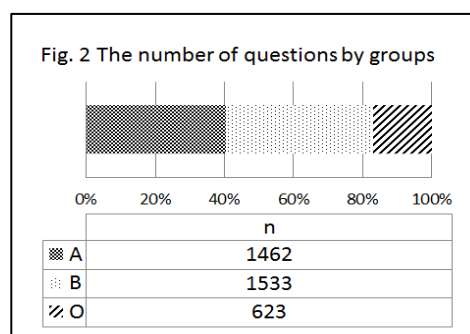
to solve the large-volume questions depending on word-to-word translation, it would be extremely difficult for them to answer even a fraction of the questions.

	Test time	Total number of words*	FRE	Number of questions	Number of A type questions	Number of B type questions
<i>M</i>	83.85	2,109.04	55.62	39.80	16.07	6.82
<i>SD</i>	19.05	815.35	9.81	12.81	9.55	8.27
<i>MAX</i>	140	4246	85.60	62.00	39.00	32.00
<i>MIN</i>	60	767	36.40	10.00	1.00	0.00

Table 1. The overall trend of the 91 examinations \*including the number of words in English directions, passages, and answer choices.

### 3.2 Percentages of A-type and B-type questions

Figure 2 shows the total number of questions given by the 33 universities according to types A, B, and O. A-type questions account for only 40.41 percent as a whole. Considering the ratio, it is not true that grammar-translation method is the most efficient way to let students pass the exams of students' choices. Moreover, since the three different types are given in entrance examinations, it is not appropriate for teachers to generalize all the examinations and teach only one way of preparation. In addition, the entrance exam industry should reflect the current trend on the practice entrance exams they produce.

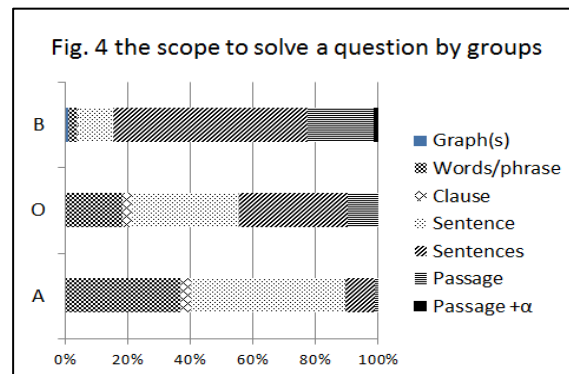
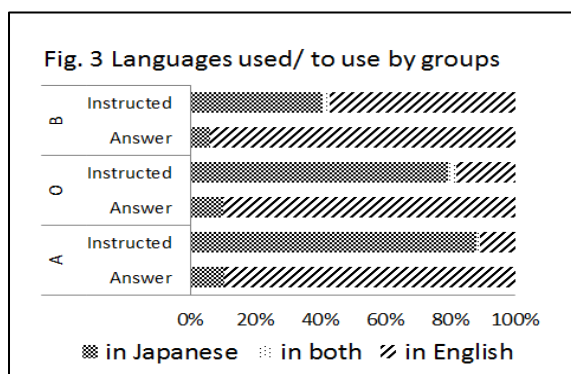


### 3.3 Characteristics of B-type questions

Figure 3 shows which language is used for directing and answering the questions. In A and O types, Japanese is mostly used for test directions. However, in B-types it is most common to give directions in English and require answers in English.

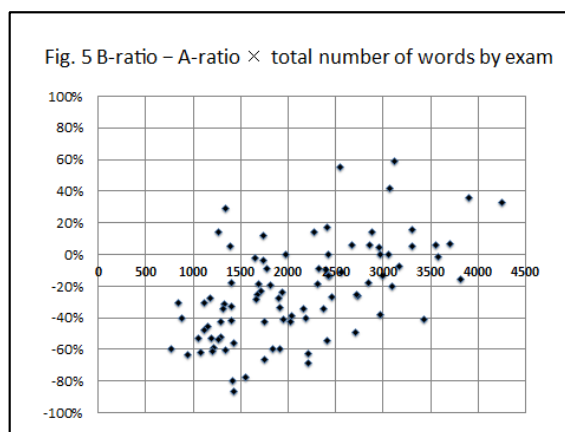
Figure 4 indicates “Ken-saku-Han-i”, i.e. the scope, or width of the text that examinees have to read in order to solve a question. It was calculated by researchers while actually solving each question. The analysis revealed that 90 percent of the A-type questions are solvable by reading immediate contexts, from a next word up to a next sentence in the text. The same is true of more than half of the questions in O type. On the contrary, concerning the B-type, less than 20 percent of the questions are solvable in this way. Over 80 percent of the B-type questions require students to read a wider context, from more than one sentence to the whole text. It means that

applicants need a high degree of reading fluency to solve B type questions and they have to read a wider context to answer.



### 3.4 The correlation of B-type questions and the number of words

Next, regarding each entrance exam, the density of B-oriented questions was calculated by using the formula [the percentage of B type questions of the total number of the questions—the percentage of A type questions of the total number of the questions]. Figure 5 shows the scatter plot with the results the B-type density on the y-axis and the total number of words on the x ( $n=91$ ). Statistically, it shows a somewhat strong correlation between the two variables



( $r=.57$ ,  $p<.001$ ). To put it in another way, the more B-oriented an exam is, the greater number of words it has, and hence the more information students have to deal with. Among these, B-oriented exams, in which the subtraction resulted in over zero percent, are listed in Table 2. Even in the examinations that are not classified as “B-oriented” in this study, B type questions have been included as provided in Example ⑧ and ⑨ in Section 2.4. Therefore, it is assumed that B-type questions have been gradually increasing.

## 3. Conclusion

Since this research is based on the analysis of limited number of examinations, as a matter of course, the results are not immediately applicable to the entire college entrance examinations. Considering it, the researchers would like to summarize the results of the analysis. As a result of analyzing 91 examinations, those questions compatible with translation and grammar teaching style, i.e. A-type questions, assumed 40.41 percent of the total questions (Figure 2). Almost 90 percent of these A-type questions require reading of a narrow context, i.e. few words or one sentence for finding an answer (Figure 4). On the other hand, B-type questions represented 17.22 percent and this number should not be ignored. Since B-type questions accompany much longer passages, and require referring to many sentences for answering, it is estimated that the questions will have a larger share in the

exam's overall scores. Considering these tendencies, we might say that the grammar-translation style teaching and exam-preparation can cope with only limited parts of the examinations consisting of a great number of words. In the future research, the researchers will analyze O-type questions and provide its definitions and examples. By doing so, we would like to examine which teaching style is more appropriate for preparing high school students for college entrance examinations-- grammar and translation oriented classes or communication oriented classes. For the detailed analysis data please refer to our project webpage (<http://www.ecrproject.com/>) .

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## Appendix

Table 2. List of the B-type oriented entrance examinations (the percentage of B type—the percentage of A type  $\geq 0$ )

No.	University	Department	year	Test time	Number of sentences/conversations	Total number of words including listening sections	Average FRE	Total number of questions	Percentage of B type — A type
1	早 稲 田 (Waseda)	文 (Liberal Arts)	08	90	2,084	3,122	39.68	49	59.18%
2	東京 (Tokyo)	共 (Common)	08	120	2,548	2,548 (4,400)	58.97	45	55.56%
3	上 智 (Jochi)	理 (Science)	08	90	1,994	3,076	48.00	50	42.00%
4	早稲田	理	09	90	1,632	3,902	63.90	53	35.85%
5	早稲田	理	08	90	1,854	4,246	46.85	52	32.69%
6	一 橋 (Hitotsu-bashi)	共	09	120	1,277	1,343 (2,038)	37.65	17	29.41%
7	立 教 (Rikko)	共	08	75	1,702	2,411	57.70	29	17.24%
8	関 西 (Kansai)	理	09	90	1,946	3,301	58.70	45	15.56%
9	甲 南 (Kohnan)	文	09	70	1,938	2,886	65.45	42	14.29%
10	東京工業 (Tokyo Kogyo)	共	08	90	1,265	1,265	55.45	21	14.29%
11	東京	共	09	120	2,245	2,276 (4,141)	59.43	49	14.29%
12	中 央 (Chuo)	理	08	80	1,538	1,742	56.20	33	12.12%

13	上智	文	08	90	2,059	3,705	39.30	60	6.67%
14	立教	共	09	75	1,777	2,672	58.60	33	6.06%
15	関西	理	08	90	2,335	3,557	64.77	50	6.00%
16	北海道 (Hokkaido)	共	08	90	2,779	2,855	48.24	17	5.88%
17	慶應(Keio)	文	09	90	2,154	3,302	47.66	55	5.45%
18	一橋	共	08	120	1,336	1,396 (1,852)	57.50	19	5.26%
19	関西	文	09	90	1,838	2,956	61.53	45	4.44%
20	甲南	理	09	70	2,296	3,055	53.93	33	0.00% <sup>[*]</sup>
21	甲南	理	08	70	2,213	2,969	53.70	34	0.00%
22	北海道	共	09	90	2,075	2,426	49.00	17	0.00%
23	龍谷 (Ryukoku)	文	08	70	1,254	1,972	56.40	35	0.00%

\*In No. 20-23, the number of A type questions is equal to that of B type questions and it led to 0%. However, since the percentage of the number of B type questions (30. 30-17.14%) is over the average of the whole, No. 20-23 are included in the B-oriented group.