

## The Expected Oral Proficiency Level for Japan's Secondary School English Teachers: Analysis of the Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade Interview Exam.

Keiso Tatsukawa\*  
*Hiroshima University*

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This paper aims to clarify the expected oral proficiency level for secondary school English teachers in Japan. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter MEXT) encourages public secondary school English teachers to reach a threshold level of the Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade of Eiken (an English proficiency test). However, the number of teachers attaining those levels has yet to reach MEXT's target. An analysis of the Pre-1<sup>st</sup> interview tests can give an indication of what MEXT expects Japanese English teachers to be able to do in oral communication. In this paper, a brief history of Eiken is reported, and the proficiency level of the Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade and the test contents are summarized. Then, features of the picture cards and questions used for the second-stage interviews from 2007 through 2015 are analyzed: (1) a series of four pictures for story narration (in total 54 cards), and (2) four questions to be asked afterwards (in total 216 question items). Some unique linguistic features are found as well as popular test topics. Also, interview questions have several featured sentence patterns and many basic-level words, as well as topic-related vocabulary items. This research will be of some help for understanding the threshold level of speaking abilities for secondary school English teachers in Japan.

**Keywords:** oral proficiency, threshold for English teachers, interview

### 1 Introduction

Threshold levels expected for English teachers vary from country to country. Wherever they teach English to students, teachers are usually expected to teach it in the target language, namely English. They should be able to speak English fluently in class. In Japan, MEXT has encouraged public secondary

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school English teachers to reach a threshold level of the Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade of Eiken by 2017; more than 50% of junior high and 75% of senior high school English teachers should attain this level. However, in 2015, only 28.8% of junior high school teachers and 55.4% of senior high teachers met this target (The Chugoku Shimbun, 2015). The author believes that if we examine the features of the Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade interview, we can have a better idea about what MEXT expects secondary school English teachers of Japan to be able to do in English in terms of oral communication. When we examine the interview exams for the grade, several specific features are found in the topics and question items. In this paper, the features of picture cards for story narration, and the questions for the oral interviews from 2007 through 2015 are reported. The findings of the paper will be of some help for understanding the expected speaking abilities for English teachers in Japan.

## **2 Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Eiken exam and past research**

The Eiken Foundation of Japan (formerly STEP, the Society for Testing English Proficiency, Inc.), or *Nihon Eigo Kentei Kyokai*, is a public-interest incorporated foundation, established in 1963, and is based in Tokyo. Eiken literally means “tests for English (proficiency)” and has a long history in Japan of more than 50 years, so when Japanese people talk about English (proficiency) tests they are often referring to Eiken tests. In the 2016 academic year, 3,393,520 people took Eiken exams; the total number of test takers since Eiken’s founding has reached 100,000,000 (<http://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/merit/situation/>).

Eiken produces and administers English-proficiency tests with the backing of MEXT and in cooperation with prefectural and local boards of education, public and private schools, and other major testing bodies. As a result, primary school pupils and junior and senior high students are often encouraged to take Eiken English-proficiency tests, and English teachers of public secondary schools are also expected to reach a threshold level of the Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade.

Numerous papers have reported on the Eiken exams. Dunlea (2009, 2010) and Ohtomo et al. (2014) discussed the relationship between the Eiken exams and CEFR levels; Funakoshi (2012) examined how achieving the Eiken grades improved high school students’ performance on the course exams at school; Tamura (2009) described how examinees should take the interviews of the Eiken Pre-2<sup>nd</sup> Grade, and gave useful tips for test-takers. Fujita et al. (2016) examined the test items of the Grade 2 Eiken test and investigated whether the test items matched the guidelines describing the targets for learners issued by MEXT, as well as the guidelines of the

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels. There is also information on the Eiken official website about the exams for different grades, and useful tips for passing the grades as well as the actual exam booklets for the previous year (<http://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/exam/>).

An area that is less well discussed in academic papers is the content in relation to the topics and question items of the interviews in the second stage of the exams. For the Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade, there are no published academic papers that thoroughly examine the contents of the interview test that follows the successful completion of the written test. This content consists of picture cards from which an examinee must narrate a story, and four questions that the examinee must answer after the narration. Given that secondary school English teachers in Japan are expected to pass the Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade, an investigation of the picture cards and question items gives an indication of what English abilities teachers are actually expected to demonstrate.

## 2.2 Eiken Pre-1st grade exam

There are seven levels in Eiken, from the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade (lowest) through to the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade (highest). The Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade is the second highest proficiency level. The Eiken official website describes the Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade as follows:

*Grade Pre-1 requires solid English skills at a level just below Grade 1, the final goal for EIKEN examinees ... Examinees are expected to be able to understand and use **the English necessary to participate in social, professional, and educational situations**. In addition to being useful for applying to post-secondary academic institutions and obtaining academic credits, **Grade Pre-1 certification has been set as a benchmark for English instructors by the Japanese MEXT, ...***

[emphasis added]

To add further detail on the test, the following paragraphs and tables give a summary of the proficiency level, test structure, and topics for the Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade ([http://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/en/grades/grade\\_p1/](http://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/en/grades/grade_p1/)).

The Eiken Organization describes the Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade as follows: Can understand and use the English necessary to participate effectively in social, professional, and educational situations. Table 1 provides the equivalent levels to the Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> test of other well-known tests. Table 2 describes what Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> holders can do in the four macro-skills in more detail.

Table 1. Pass Level Comparison between the Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade and Other English Tests

| EIKEN | EIKEN CSE score | TEAP | CEFR | TOEFL® score |     |
|-------|-----------------|------|------|--------------|-----|
|       |                 |      |      | PBT          | iBT |
| Grade | 2304            | 334  | B2   | 550          | 80  |

|       |  |  |  |  |  |
|-------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Pre-1 |  |  |  |  |  |
|-------|--|--|--|--|--|

**Table 2. Summary of Can-do Statements for the Eiken Pre-1st Grade**

Below are summaries of the main features of the tasks and activities that typical Grade Pre-1 certificate holders feel confident about performing in English in real-life language-use situations

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Reading   | Can understand texts from a range of social, professional, and educational situations.   |
| Listening | Can understand content from a range of social, professional, and educational situations.   |
| Speaking  | Can make explanations and express his/her opinions about topics relevant to a range of social, professional, and educational situations. |
| Writing   | Can write at length about topics from everyday life and topics relevant to some social, professional, and educational situations.        |

The examination is divided into two parts: Stage 1 (a written examination including a listening section) and Stage 2 (an interview-format speaking test). Table 3 gives information on Stage 1, and table 4 outlines the structure of Stage 2. The Eiken official site notes that popular topics for the grade are as follows ([http://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/en/grades/grade\\_p1/](http://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/en/grades/grade_p1/)): general social situations, arts, culture, history, education, science, nature, environment, medicine, technology, business, politics, etc.

**Table 3. Overview for Stage 1 of the Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade;  
Time allotted: Reading & Writing (90 minutes) / Listening (app. 25 minutes)**

| Skill area | Task                  | Format   | Items | Response type                          |
|------------|-----------------------|--|-------|--|
| Reading    | Sentence completion   | 25 short texts (one or two sentences/dialogues) from which one word or phrase has been omitted | 25    | Multiple-choice (Four printed options) |
|            | Gap fill (passages)   | 2 passages from which several phrases have been omitted  | 6     |  |
|            | Q&A based on passages | 3 passages followed by questions   | 10    |  |
| Writing    | English Composition   | 1 topic question with 4 points (examinees must address 2 points)                               | 1     | 120-150 word composition               |

The Expected Oral Proficiency Level  
for Japan's Secondary School English Teachers

|           |                         |   |    |   |
|-----------|-------------------------|---|----|---|
| Listening | Q&A based on dialogues  | 12 recorded conversations/discussions followed by questions   | 10 | Multiple-choice<br>(Four printed options) |
|           | Q&A based on monologues | 6 recorded announcements, advertisements, news stories, or short lectures followed by questions   | 10 |   |
|           | Real-life Listening     | 5 recorded announcements, advertisements, news stories, or short lectures followed by questions. (Examinees read a short description of the situation, and the question, before listening.) | 5  |   |

Table 4. Overview for Stage 2 of the Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade (app. 8 min.)

| Skill area | Task            | Format   |   | Time allotted    | Notes  |
|------------|-----------------|--|---|------------------|--|
| Speaking   | Warm-up         | Examiners engage examinee in free conversation (not evaluated) |   | 1 or 2 questions | Evaluation Criteria:<br>Examinees are evaluated separately for the narration, for responses to each question, and for their attitude toward actively engaging in communication.<br><br>No. of Examiners: 1 |
|            | Short Narration | Preparation  | Examinee reads question card silently and prepares to narrate four-panel illustration on card | 1 minute         |  |
|            |                 | Delivery   | Examinee gives Narration based on topic   | 2 minutes        |  |
|            | Q&A             | No. 1  | Examiner asks question connected to/related to illustration                                   |                  |  |
|            |                 | No. 2  | Examiner asks question related to general topic of card                                       |                  |  |
|            |                 | No. 3  | Examiner asks question related to general topic of card                                       |                  |  |

|  |  |       |  |  |
|--|--|-------|--|--|
|  |  | No. 4 | Examiner asks question about social issue or idea broadly related to general topic of card |  |
|--|--|-------|--|--|

### 2.3 Second stage interview

For the second stage interviews of the Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade, picture cards are used. Each card contains a series of four pictures as well as a five-line instruction. For example, the following is the instruction for Picture Card A used in February 2010, along with the four pictures for the story:

You have **one minute** to prepare.

This is a story about a woman who wanted to stop people from smoking on the street.

You have **two minutes** to narrate the story.

Your story should begin with the following sentence:

**One day, a woman was on her way to work.**



Figure 1. The Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade picture card used in February 2010

The first, third, and fourth lines of the instructions are always used on the cards. The second and fifth sentences relate to a particular card and are important for thinking about the narration of the story.

### 3 The study method

The author collected all the Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade second-stage interview exam pictures and question items from 2007 through 2015 (academic years, April to March) from the official guidebooks by Obunsha (2008-2016). Then, the topics of the picture cards used for the interviews over the nine years were carefully analyzed. There were 54 picture cards and 216 question items in total. The questions were typed into an Excel spreadsheet, and then categorized into different topics, and analyzed from the viewpoint of

linguistic features, such as sentence length, sentence patterns, and vocabulary frequency levels.

## 4 Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Picture cards

Each picture card has a series of four pictures and deals with social issues. Table 5 on the next page shows popular topics (key words) for picture card content for 2007 through 2015. It should be noted that there is sometimes a topic shift in the sequence of the four pictures, meaning that it can be extremely difficult to assign a single topic to a card.

As mentioned in Section 2.2 above, examinees are expected to be able to understand and use the English necessary to participate “in social, professional, and educational situations.” Therefore, such social topics as “general social issues,” “job/work,” “public services,” “companies/offices,” “work & life balance,” “education,” “housing,” “local shopping areas,” “caring for old people,” “aging society,” “child care,” and “food safety” occupy 68.7%, which is about two-thirds of the topics. These topics are more suitable for adults than for younger people or students. There are of course more general and popular topics for young students, related to their school studies, for example “environment,” “ICT,” “health,” “keeping pets.” They occupy 20.5% (about one-fifth). Therefore, test-takers need some basic knowledge or interest about important social issues and should be ready to discuss them, as well as topics more concerned with general daily life.

Table 5. Popular topics (key words) for the picture card content

| Topics (key words)    | F. | %    | Topics (key words)    | F. | %   |
|-----------------------|----|------|-----------------------|----|-----|
| General social issues | 8  | 14.8 | Health                | 2  | 3.7 |
| Job/Work              | 6  | 11.1 | Housing               | 2  | 3.7 |
| Environment           | 5  | 9.3  | Local shopping areas  | 2  | 3.7 |
| Public services       | 5  | 9.3  | Caring for old people | 1  | 1.9 |
| Companies/Offices     | 4  | 7.4  | Smoking               | 1  | 1.9 |
| Work & life balance   | 4  | 7.4  | Aging society         | 1  | 1.9 |
| ICT                   | 3  | 5.6  | Child care            | 1  | 1.9 |
| Family life           | 2  | 3.7  | Food safety           | 1  | 1.9 |
| Vacation              | 2  | 3.7  | Keeping pets          | 1  | 1.9 |
| Education             | 2  | 3.7  | Other(s)              | 1  | 1.9 |
|                       |    |      | Total                 | 54 |     |

\* F.=Frequency

## 4.2 Question items

Following the story narration, there are four questions to be asked. The first question is always related to one of the four pictures (usually the last one) on the card whereas the other three questions are related to the general topic of the story or about general social issues.

### 4.2.1 Question 1

The first question is always based on the information in the pictures. Regarding linguistic features, the subjunctive mood is always used. As can be seen in Table 6, the word “would” is used in all of them, as well as “If”, “what”, “were”, and “picture”, an example being “If you were the restaurant owner in the fourth picture, what would you be thinking?” A possible answer is “I would

Table 6. Words Used more than Five Times in Question 1

| Rank | F.  | Word    | Rank | F. | Word     |
|------|-----|---------|------|----|----------|
| 1    | 108 | the     | 8    | 52 | at       |
| 2    | 107 | you     | 8    | 52 | Please   |
| 3    | 54  | would   | 8    | 52 | fourth   |
| 3    | 54  | what    | 12   | 46 | thinking |
| 3    | 54  | were    | 13   | 45 | be       |
| 3    | 54  | picture | 14   | 21 | man      |
| 3    | 54  | If      | 15   | 14 | woman    |
| 8    | 52  | look    | 16   | 5  | husband  |

\*F.= Frequency

continue to cook and serve good tasty dishes, so that I could keep my customers. Also, I would like to create a comfortable atmosphere in my restaurant. I would never give up.” The question requires test-takers to express their ideas using the “subjunctive mood” in English. With Question No.1, when we use the “subjunctive mood,” we have to put ourselves in a difficult imaginary situation and express a reaction to a given problem. This can be a demanding task.

### 4.2.2 Questions 2 - 4

Questions 2 through 4 are about social issues or ideas broadly related to the general topic of card, so there are a variety of topics or subjects (see Table 7). In terms of topics, the following social topics occupy more than half (58.6%): “working places,” “education,” “social issues,” “child care,” “companies/offices,” “politics,” “public services,” “social security,” “gender problems,” and “aging society.” Other more general topics, which we can see occurring frequently in the authorized junior and senior high school textbooks and so



The Expected Oral Proficiency Level  
for Japan's Secondary School English Teachers

are easier for younger people to answer, are also provided: “environment,” “ICT,” “sports,” “traffic services,” “health,” etc.

Table 7. Popular Topics or Subjects of Questions 2 through 4

| Topics or subjects    | F. | %    | Topics or subjects | F. | %    |
|-----------------------|----|------|--------------------|----|------|
| Working places        | 16 | 9.88 | ICT                | 7  | 4.32 |
| Education             | 15 | 9.26 | Politics           | 6  | 3.70 |
| General Social Issues | 15 | 9.26 | Public services    | 5  | 3.09 |
| Child care            | 13 | 8.02 | Traffic            | 5  | 3.09 |
| Companies/Offices     | 11 | 6.79 | Sports             | 5  | 3.09 |
| Environment           | 8  | 4.94 |                    |    |      |

\* F.=Frequency

The following are some typical questions for popular topics:

(general social issues)

2010-2 B4: Is it acceptable for the media to investigate the private lives of celebrities?

(working places)

2014-2 A3: Do people today change jobs more frequently than people did in the past?

(public services)

2009-1 A3: Should local governments provide more services for the community?

(companies/offices)

2015-1 A3: Do you think that companies spend too much money on advertising?

(work and life balance)

2010-2 A2: Do you think that married couples share the housework more equally these days?

### 4.3 Linguistic features of questions 2 - 4

#### 4.3.1 Length of questions

Next, some linguistic features of Questions 2-4 will be examined. The following are some linguistic analysis data for the 162 questions:

Number of sentences for each question: 1 sentence=160, 2 sentences=2

Length of question(s): Average=12.94 words

Shortest=7 words

Longest=21 words

Here are some examples for the above information:

7 words: Should parents be stricter with their children? 2013-1-A-Q2

8 words: Should education get more funding from the government?  
2014-1-A-Q4

21 words: Should employees be promoted based on their work performance or on the length of time they have worked for their company? 2010-1-B-Q4

21 words: Do you think that more people will want to work for the government rather than for private companies in the future?  
2012-1-B-Q4

Over the interviews for the nine years, there were only two question items which consisted of two sentences:

These days, more young people from urban areas are interested in working in agriculture. What do you think about that? 2007-1-A-Q3(20 words)

Some high-class restaurants do not allow customers to bring their young children with them. What do you think about that? 2008-1-B-Q2(20words)

As can be seen above, two question items are made up of declarative sentences which are stated first, followed by the interrogative sentence “What do you think about that?” So as far as listeners understand the first statement, it is not difficult to answer questions of this kind. However, these kinds of question do not appear in more recent years.

When answering questions, examinees should be able to add some “logical reasons” or “additional information”. Here are some examples shown on the Eiken site for a “virtual speaking test” (Grade Pre-1) ([http://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/exam/virtual/grade\\_p1/](http://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/exam/virtual/grade_p1/)):

Question 2: Should more be done to warn children about the dangers of smoking?

Model answer: No. Most schools explain to students that smoking is harmful to their health. This seems to be working as I’ve heard that the smoking rate is declining.

Question 3: Do you think that the crime rate in Japan will increase in the future?

Model answer: Yes. The poor economic conditions are unlikely to improve soon. So, unemployment will increase. This will cause more people to turn to crime in order to survive.

#### **4.3.2 Patterns of questions**

In this section, we will examine the sentence patterns of Questions 2 through 4 over nine years. Table 8 shows eight sentence patterns used in the interviews. Sentences beginning with the phrase “Do you think ...?” were the most popular and covered 46.9% of the items. If we add the patterns “Why

The Expected Oral Proficiency Level  
for Japan's Secondary School English Teachers

do you think ...?" and "What do you think about it?", the number of items rises to more than half (52.1%). Also, the sentences beginning with "Should ...?" made up about a quarter of the items, namely 24.7%. From these figures, we can say that examinees for the Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade are expected to express abstract ideas with persuasive reasons.

Table 8. Sentence Structural Features of Questions 2 through 4

| Sentence patterns             | N   | %     |
|-------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Do you think ...?             | 76  | 46.9% |
| Should ...?                   | 40  | 24.7% |
| Yes/No                        | 35  | 21.6% |
| Why do you think ...?         | 5   | 3.1%  |
| Which ...?                    | 3   | 1.9%  |
| What do you think about that? | 2   | 1.2%  |
| How ...?                      | 1   | 0.6%  |
| Total                         | 162 |       |

The next important structure is the "Yes/No question" sentence pattern. As can be seen in Table 9, there are 35 items of this kind out of 162, which is about one-fifth (21.6%). According to the answer keys shown on the Eiken website and in annual official guidebooks for Eiken test takers (Obunsha, 2008-2016), answering with "yes" or "no" is not good enough ([http://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/exam/virtual/grade\\_p1/](http://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/exam/virtual/grade_p1/)). Some supporting details are required to make the answer persuasive and get a higher score. In addition, although their sentence patterns are not "Yes/No" question, eight sentences contained "than" and another seven contained "or," which means some comparison was expected in the response. (See Table 10.) Examinees should express their stance either "for" or "against" something and state some supporting details showing their reasoning.

Table 9. Beginning Word for Yes/No Question

| Beginning | N  | %     |
|-----------|----|-------|
| Do        | 11 | 31.4% |
| Is        | 9  | 25.7% |
| Are       | 5  | 14.3% |
| Will      | 3  | 8.6%  |
| Does      | 2  | 5.7%  |
| Can       | 1  | 2.9%  |
| Has       | 1  | 2.9%  |

|       |    |      |
|-------|----|------|
| Have  | 1  | 2.9% |
| Were  | 1  | 2.9% |
| Would | 1  | 2.9% |
| Total | 35 |      |

Table 10. Choosing Questions

| than/or | N  | %    |
|---------|----|------|
| than    | 8  | 4.9% |
| or      | 7  | 4.3% |
| Total   | 15 |      |

#### 4.4 Vocabulary used in questions

Table 11 shows analysis data for vocabulary used in the Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade interview questions.

Table 11. Vocabulary Levels Used for Interview Questions

| Level | 1         | 2        | 3        | 4        | 5       | 6       | 7       | 8       | Others  | Total |
|-------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| All   | 361 (.69) | 65 (.12) | 34 (.07) | 32 (.06) | 8 (.02) | 5 (.01) | 2 (.00) | 6 (.01) | 8 (.02) | 521   |
| Nouns | 144 (.64) | 36 (.16) | 29 (.09) | 11 (.05) | 3 (.01) | 4 (.02) | 1 (.00) | 3 (.01) | 4 (.02) | 226   |
| Verbs | 102 (.71) | 15 (.10) | 7 (.05)  | 15 (.10) | 2 (.01) | 1 (.01) | 0 (.00) | 0 (.00) | 2 (.01) | 144   |

The total number of words used in the question items over nine years, namely from 2007 through 2015, is 2,103 tokens. There are 521 different words (types) in a “case sensitive” way of counting. Appendix A shows a list of the top 108 most frequently used words that appeared four times or more in the interview questions. The “type token ratio (TTR)” is about 0.25. As the TTR of native speakers’ spoken messages is usually around 0.50 (Biber et al, 2002), the TTR in the question items of Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade is very low. Therefore, we can think that the variety of vocabulary is rather restricted compared to ordinary conversational use, and may be a feature of oral test questions in general.

The author also examined the vocabulary level using the JACET 8000. JACET is the abbreviation for ‘Japan Association of College English Teachers’, and the list has been developed based on the frequency data of the BNC (British National Corpus) and also those of authorized secondary school textbooks and university entrance examination items. The JACET 8000 word list is considered to be one of the most reliable lists when we discuss the vocabulary levels of English and is often used for research and materials development. There are eight levels in the JACET 8000, from Level 1

through level 8, as can be seen in Table 11. There are 521 words in total from the Eiken questions. 81% of the items appear in Levels 1 & 2 (69%+12%). When we examine nouns and verbs, we can say the same thing: 80% of nouns (64%+16%), and 81% of verbs (71%+10%) were in Levels 1 & 2. Figure 2 clearly shows that the frequency of high-level items is very low in the interview question items. Examples of Level 8 items are “garbage”, “nutrition”, “stressful”, “renewable”, and “genetically”. In summary, we can conclude that a lot of basic items of vocabulary belonging to Levels 1 & 2 and a small number of topic-related higher-level words were used in the question items. However, it should be noted that comprehension of key words in the questions is vital because there is very little context on which the examinee can draw.

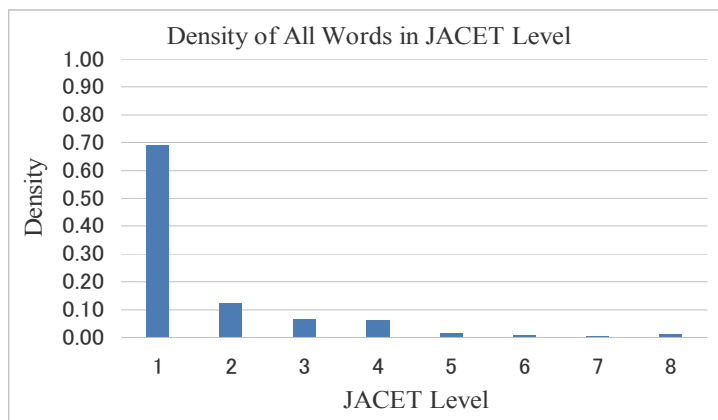


Figure 2. Density of all words in JACET 8000 Level

## 5 Implications and Conclusion

The findings of this paper show that MEXT expects Japanese secondary school English teachers to be able to understand and orally express social issues both persuasively and fluently. Brown and Yule's (1983) analysis of text genres provides a useful framework for evaluating task difficulty:

1. Static relationships
  - (i) Describing an object or photograph
  - (ii) Instructing someone to draw a diagram
  - (iii) Instructing someone how to assemble a piece of equipment
  - (iv) Giving route directions
2. Dynamic relationships

- (i) Story-telling (→ **picture card narration**)
  - (ii) Giving an eye-witness account
3. Abstract relationships
- (i) Opinion-expressing (→ **four Q & A's**)
  - (ii) Justifying a course of action

They argue that understanding and expressing ‘abstract relationships’ is more difficult than ‘dynamic relationships’ and the latter is more difficult than ‘static relationships’. As can be seen in their categorization above, ‘story-telling’ forms part of “dynamic relationships.” Picture card narration in Eiken reflects this category. The four questions in Eiken reflect ‘opinion-expressing,’ which forms part of “abstract relationships.” Consequently, the Eiken interview requires test-takers to demonstrate some ability to deal with demanding tasks.

In March 2017, the new Course of Study, which is going to be implemented in the academic year 2020, was announced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan. MEXT expects and encourages teachers to nurture and improve their students’ abilities to think logically, make decisions, and express their ideas and feelings effectively and persuasively. As students themselves are encouraged to have those abilities to think logically and express their ideas and feelings effectively in English, teachers are naturally also expected to reach this threshold. However, the Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade test is only a threshold, and further research will be oriented towards clarifying the wider skill set that secondary school teachers need.

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The Expected Oral Proficiency Level  
for Japan's Secondary School English Teachers

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**Appendix A**

**Top Frequency Words Used in the Questions for the Eiken Pre-1<sup>st</sup> Grade**

| Frequency | word       | Frequency | word      | Frequency | word       |
|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 198       | the        | 16        | Japan     | 5         | your       |
| 195       | you        | 15        | work      | 5         | when       |
| 87        | think      | 15        | woman     | 5         | time       |
| 87        | Do         | 15        | should    | 5         | system     |
| 83        | that       | 15        | and       | 5         | students   |
| 75        | to         | 14        | have      | 5         | schools    |
| 75        | be         | 14        | companies | 5         | past       |
| 61        | people     | 13        | young     | 5         | money      |
| 60        | in         | 13        | parents   | 5         | make       |
| 56        | would      | 12        | it        | 5         | lives      |
| 55        | what       | 12        | future    | 5         | live       |
| 55        | at         | 11        | important | 5         | husband    |
| 54        | were       | 10        | will      | 5         | father     |
| 54        | picture    | 10        | s         | 5         | experience |
| 54        | If         | 10        | much      | 5         | cars       |
| 52        | look       | 10        | is        | 5         | by         |
| 52        | Please     | 9         | good      | 5         | becoming   |
| 49        | fourth     | 9         | employees | 5         | Why        |
| 47        | more       | 9         | done      | 5         | Are        |
| 46        | thinking   | 9         | about     | 4         | way        |
| 40        | Should     | 9         | Is        | 4         | university |
| 32        | of         | 8         | than      | 4         | take       |
| 31        | their      | 8         | public    | 4         | stricter   |
| 27        | children   | 8         | enough    | 4         | spend      |
| 26        | with       | 8         | education | 4         | pressure   |
| 23        | on         | 7         | society   | 4         | place      |
| 22        | for        | 7         | or        | 4         | most       |
| 21        | man        | 7         | improve   | 4         | has        |
| 21        | do         | 6         | they      | 4         | from       |
| 19        | days       | 6         | provide   | 4         | family     |
| 18        | too        | 6         | less      | 4         | concerned  |
| 18        | today      | 6         | influence | 4         | company    |
| 18        | these      | 6         | get       | 4         | city       |
| 17        | government | 6         | become    | 4         | cities     |
| 17        | are        |           |           | 4         | can        |
| 17        | a          |           |           | 4         | between    |
|           |            |           |           | 4         | as         |
|           |            |           |           | 4         | Internet   |

Keiso Tatsukawa  
 Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education  
 Hiroshima University  
 1-7-1 Kagamiyama  
 Higashi-Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Pref.  
 Japan 739-8521  
 Tel: 082-424-6439/6424  
 E-mail: tatsukawa@hiroshima-u.ac.jp

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