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The Decline Continues
A Further Look at the English Proficiency of Prospective Company
Entrants (Naiteisha) from 1985 to 1990

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There has been considerable concern about what many have
perceived to be a decline the English proficiency of school leavers in
Japan, but there has been little or no data to confirm or deny these
fears. At the March 1989 Tsukuba Testing Conference we presented
data on college seniors who had been accepted by two major trading
companies and four banks between 1985 and 1989. That data, the
results of 4000 candidates on the Businessman's English Test and
Appraisal (BETA) showed a statistically significant decline in the
English proficiency of these 'naiteisha' over the five year period. In
that paper we looked primarily at the differences in the mean total
scores (on the 211 item multiple choice test). In the analysis
presented here, we include the results of this year's company
entrants and further analyze the data for the whole six years.

The decline in overall mean scores noted in the earlier paper
could also be seen in the results of those who entered the companies
this April. Our analysis of part scores and grade levels to which test
takers are assigned for further training showed that, although the
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'naiteisha' of the various companies did not perform in exactly the same way, there are some rather clear general patterns. An examination of the part scores (Grammar, Reading, and Aural Comprehension) indicates that the decline is not uniform across the several skills. Although the decline in other part scores was generally significant at the 0.05 level, we could find little statistically significant change in the Aural Comprehension scores. Differences between companies is even more noticeable when we turn our attention to the grade levels to which test takers are assigned. However, a decline in the number of those scoring at the top end of the scale on BETA, could be seen across all companies. There is little, if any, change in the percentage of those assigned to the lowest grades. We discuss some possible explanations of both the overall decline and the other patterns we have detected.