

Interview with Spanish Language Professor JAIME RECUERO DÍAZ

Q1: ¡Buenos días! Can you briefly introduce yourself to our readers?

A: My name is Jaime Recuero Díaz from Madrid, Spain. I have been teaching Spanish for over five years and one year at APU. Before APU, I taught for two years at another university in Japan and also returned to Madrid to teach online briefly during the pandemic.



Professor Recuero Díaz responding to a student's question

Q2: Before we jump into the serious questions, if you had to teach Spanish using only one song, what would it be?

A: Hispanic culture is incredibly diverse, and if I had to choose only one song that might capture a bit of the dynamic journey of learning Spanish, it would be the YouTube hit called “*Qué difícil es hablar el español*” (“It’s so hard to speak Spanish”) which was created by two Colombians. The lyrics humorously encapsulate the challenges that learners face due to the rich regional variations in Spanish slang. For example, the song mentions the word *chucho*, which, although it means “dog” in Spain, may mean “jail” in Chile or “cold” in Argentina. Personally, I also find this song resonates in terms of the real experiences I have communicating with my friends from different Spanish-speaking countries, where casual words can lead to amusing misunderstandings.

Q3: Sounds interesting! Your reputation for building strong relationships with students is well known. How do you motivate and keep students engaged?

“Empathy is the cornerstone of my teaching approach”

A: Drawing from my own experience as a language learner, I totally understand the challenges of navigating a linguistic system so distinct from my mother tongue such as Japanese, which, from some students’ perspectives, may be akin to learning Spanish.

Therefore, **empathy** is the cornerstone of my teaching approach. I acknowledge that each student learns differently, and at APU I try to use both English and Japanese as a bridge to translate complex concepts so that no one is left behind.



In-class group discussion work

Adaptability is another crucial quality I bring to my teaching. Recognizing the diverse interests and learning paces of the students, I design activities to captivate each student and cater to both quick and struggling learners, while steering away from mundane grammar exercises. For example, one activity I have used to cover the diverse interests and learning paces of students is a version of the well-known “Guess Who?” game involving famous figures from Spanish and Latin American cultures. Students themselves contribute the names of singers or musicians familiar to them, engaging them through their personal interest in these cultures. This activity not only reinforces vocabulary and grammar structures, but also adds fun and cultural relevance to the learning experience.

“Unlike other subjects, learning languages is all about the casual daily aspects of life”

Q4: Please share one of the most memorable language-related events or activities that you have organized in or outside of your class.

A: One of the most memorable activities that I organized involved having students create a video showcasing a day in their lives, drawing inspiration from a movie we had watched in an earlier class. This activity served as a method to personalize language learning and connect it with real-life situations. I have yet to conduct this activity at APU and am looking forward to experimenting with it soon.

The short film that the activity was based on is called *Spain in a Day*. It unfolds random moments from the routines of numerous Spanish-speaking individuals in Spain and elsewhere over the course of an entire day.



Subi, A. A., et al. (Directors). *Spain in a Day*. (2016) [Film]. Spain: Media Pro Pictures. Retrieved from https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6100110/?ref_=ttfc_fc_tt

The intriguing aspect of this movie lies in the subjects' diverse locations and backgrounds, enabling viewers to compare the various lives, offering authentic insights into different families, and depicting daily moments of struggles at work, happiness, sadness, and even conflict.

When I implemented this activity in the past, the results of the presentations went far beyond my expectations. The presentations turned out to be quite emotional, bringing laughter and even a few tears. Each student, even those who initially seemed uninterested, participated eagerly, carefully adding subtitles or effects to their videos. I remember one student who initially seemed shy and reserved proudly showed off his snake pet to everyone in his video, and I thought it was great to share some personal information with everybody like that, proving that even during the last day of school it's never too late to learn a little about ourselves.

I would love to do this same activity at APU, especially since I believe that creating a day in the life video is a unique experience that other subjects cannot offer as they do not cover the casual daily aspects of life in the way that language classes do. At some point in the course of language learning, students will encounter situations that require expressing themselves on a deeper personal level. Therefore, I found incorporating this kind of practical and meaningful activity into a language class to be very valuable.

Q5: How would you challenge someone who is struggling to learn and a quick learner in the same class?

A: Having a different learning pace is not a matter of intelligence; rather, some students may possess more effective ways of grasping language or are simply adept learners. After a few weeks into a class, I should be able to identify students' needs on an individual level.

After grasping their individual needs, encouraging collaboration in teams with mixed learning paces can be beneficial. Combining quick learners with those who struggle fosters cooperation, as it allows students to consider class material from other perspectives by having to explain in their own words what they know or by allowing students to ask questions to their peers.

Another approach is to encourage students to be more self-directed. For example, in an oral test or

presentation, I allow students plenty of autonomy in determining how extensively they wish to prepare. Some students might opt to focus solely on the fundamental structures being studied, enabling them to first comprehend and practice the foundational elements on the way to mastering the language. Meanwhile, quick learners may prefer to delve deeper into the material.

Q6: Please share an example of something valuable you learned from a colleague.

A: Professor Eduardo Vila Lopez from Valencia once shared a useful in-class activity with me: **dictation.**

At first, I considered dictation to be somewhat outdated, finding it either too monotonous or challenging for beginners. However, Eduardo's approach intrigued me. I usually had students translate a Spanish phrase into English for universal understanding, but he conducted his dictation exercises entirely in Spanish and told the students to transcribe what they heard directly into their native languages rather than writing it down in Spanish, a method that I had

not considered before. Here at APU, since students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, encouraging them to use their preferred languages might help everyone learn at a similar level. Curious, I asked Professor Eduardo how he ensured his own comprehension to provide feedback, given that he may not speak the language the student used. He responded that the aim of his dictation exercise is to create a relaxed atmosphere in which students can focus solely on learning Spanish. Allowing students to express themselves in their mother tongues, even if their work is not understood by the teacher, contributes to a comfortable and therefore effective learning environment.

Q7: What do you envision for the future of language education at our university, and how can other faculty members contribute to its development?

A: Our faculty members should aim to inform students about what APU has to offer through presentations or seminars. For instance, from the next semester APU will be the first institution in Kyushu to host DELE (a Spanish language proficiency exam). Another example of a valuable APU resource is the Self-Access Learning Center. SALC is such a creative and promising concept but many students are still unfamiliar with how it operates and how to make the most of it.

Another wild consideration is to explore innovative tools beyond conventional platforms like Moodle. While Moodle facilitates teacher-student communication on class material, there is room to enhance the interaction and learning experience, such as by incorporating podcasts, YouTube channels, game-based learning applications, or even developing a mobile application / forum exclusively for APU students.



Q8: Thank you so much! To conclude our interview, please teach me a Spanish phrase!

A: *Pase lo que pase ...* (“No matter what happens...”)

A useful phrase and title to one of my favorite songs, this phrase is a beautiful thing to say. It means “no matter what happens...”, and you can plug in many ideas after the phrase. *Pase lo que pase . . .* be happy, *Pase lo que pase . . .* do your best, or like in the song, *la vida continua* (“life continues”). This phrase is useful due to its versatility in the number of ideas and expressions that can come afterwards. We need to remember that life persists irrespective of one’s circumstances - so there is no point in stressing ourselves out too much, right?

Interviewer Impressions

Interviewer and Author

Zoey, Vietnam

APM (Accounting & Finance)

I took Spanish 1 with Professor Jaime and everyone in the class loved his energy. Despite the class being in 1st period every day, I'm not exaggerating when I say that I genuinely felt excited to get up and go to campus. My personal favorite part was feeling completely comfortable asking Professor Jaime any questions regarding the class content or beyond and his replying with enthusiasm. He loves sharing about Spanish cultures and his impressions about Japan compared to Spain as well which I think is very interesting.



Professor Recuero Díaz (Center) with Interviewers Aung (Left) and Zoey (Right)

Interviewer

Aung, Myanmar

APM

Many of my peers have enthusiastically recommended Professor Jaime's classes, and after conducting an interview with him, it is clear to me why he is so highly recommended. Throughout our conversation, Professor Jaime's passion for teaching was unmistakably evident. He exudes a genuine enthusiasm for his subject matter, which seems to naturally engage and inspire his students.

Moreover, Professor Jaime is committed to delivering his best effort in every class, ensuring that all students not only learn but also enjoy the experience. His approach to teaching is not confined to traditional methods: he creatively seeks to understand and connect with his students on a deeper level, making his classes both educational and uniquely interactive.

Having had this insightful interaction, I am now more eager than ever to experience one of Professor Jaime's Spanish classes firsthand, should the opportunity arise in the future.

What is [Q]?



At APU there are many professors who put together wonderful classes, and if we could get to know how these classes are planned, it would contribute to the improvement of other professors' classes. For that purpose, we have begun doing interviews in order to learn about class planning. These articles have been entitled [Q], comprising a variety of meanings such as: increasing the [Q]uality of classes, answering [Q]uestions to increase quality, and forming a [Q]ueue, or line, of class improvements. We would be very happy if these articles could contribute to the [Q]uest of APU professors' class quality improvement.