

## Interview with Japanese Language Tenured Senior Lecturer Itabashi and her Student Lee Dongmin

### Creating classes that support mutual learning among students

This interview was conducted to look into the Japanese language learning process at APU. We interviewed Tenured Senior Lecturer Itabashi, an APU Japanese language teacher, and her student Lee Dongmin to better understand how Japanese language classes work and how the Professor and her student think about teaching and learning processes.



**Tenured Senior Lecturer Itabashi**



**Lee Dongmin**

**Q. Please introduce yourselves.**

**Lee Dongmin:** My name is Lee Dongmin. I'm from Korea and I am currently a 2nd-year student in the College of International Management (APM) at APU.

**Professor Itabashi:** I am Tamiko Itabashi, a Japanese language teacher at APU.

### Part 1: In-class Activities

**Q. What do you like the most about Japanese class?**

**Lee Dongmin:** My favorite part of the class is having time to share the meaning and story behind the new words we learn each week. Thanks to that, we can refresh our vocabulary and share new words with friends.

**Professor Itabashi:** The part I like about Japanese class is comparing students' different approaches and values from various regions worldwide. Moreover, being able to directly witness the students' Japanese skills develop each semester is something I love about teaching Japanese classes.

**Q. Lee Dongmin-san, what is the atmosphere like in Professor Itabashi's class? How do you feel influenced by the Professor's class?**

**Lee Dongmin:** The atmosphere of Professor Itabashi's class feels very open. It's an atmosphere where students continue to learn independently as discussions with the teacher and classmates are valued. In Professor Itabashi's class, I think logical explanations and being able to write prose are essential. We read the textbook and craft critical questions for assignments, which also helps my critical thinking skills.

**Q. That's interesting. Professor Itabashi, could you share about the critical thinking aspect that Lee-san mentioned?**

**Professor Itabashi:** Regarding critical thinking, I thought about what could be done and called critical thinking. I read various literature on the subject and thought of one specific action as having various questions towards what we read and what people say. From that, I gave assignments in which students create critical questions to make opportunities for them to consider evidence. Towards what the students thought themselves,

they had discussions with their classmates to ultimately understand what kind of evidence can be used to make a strong argument.

**Q. Lee Dongmin-san, what were some of Professor Itabashi's assignments or activities that left an impression on you?**

**Lee Dongmin:** One activity I was impressed by was the discovery activity. In this activity, we thoroughly researched a topic that we were interested in and presented it to our classmates. I researched the reason why JR Kyushu tickets are more expensive compared to train tickets in Korea from an economic perspective. Since then, I have continued to be interested in the JR Company.

**Q. Professor Itabashi, are students free to choose the research activity topic?**

**Professor Itabashi:** Choosing a topic is not entirely up to the students, but as six topics are covered in class, including tourism, language, and child labor, from those topics students choose a topic relevant to their specialization or proceed with a topic that they are interested in.

**Q. Can you share your methods for organizing a class?**

**Professor Itabashi:** Students cannot choose the textbook, but I try to let them choose what kinds of activities are done in class. I also enable them to choose homework and create an atmosphere in which they are asked to choose topics they like such as in the discovery activity. As expected, in the class evaluation

survey, many students commented that being able to choose something they wanted to do was a positive point.

**Q. How do you motivate students to move on to Advanced Japanese?**

**Professor Itabashi:** I have recently been teaching the Japanese Intermediate Course. In teaching this class, I do not think much about “having intermediate-level students proceed to the advanced-level class”, but instead want to help students achieve their goals for the class by giving them the necessary resources, as each student’s goals are different. Within this process, I also sometimes recommend that students considering work in Japan, taking the JLPT (Japanese Language Proficiency Test), or taking more Japanese language classes take the advanced-level class.

**Q. Lee Dongmin-san, what was the reason that you wanted to take Advanced Japanese and what are your particular goals?**

**Lee Dongmin:** After coming to APU, my love for Japan grew and I decided that I would like to continue living here after I graduate. Therefore, I needed the communication skills to job hunt and work in Japan in the future, and so I took the Advanced Japanese class. My other goals before taking Japanese language classes were to learn the academic skills of reading and listening comprehension.

**Q. Could you elaborate more on the reason your love for Japan grew?**

**Lee Dongmin:** Before coming to APU, my image of Japan was a peaceful image. After coming to APU, I realized that Japan is a unique society. In addition to being peaceful, Japan is growing economically, and its national character is kindness. These points attracted me, and I came to love Japan more.

## Part 2: Extracurricular Activities

**Interviewer’s Note:** The Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) offers a wide range of language support options for students studying Japanese (and other languages), including conversation practice provided by a Japanese teacher (Professor Itabashi this semester) in two 30-minute slots each week.



**The Self-Access Learning Center (SALC)**

**Q. Professor Itabashi, as the SALC Coordinator and an APU Japanese language teacher, what do you think is critical for students to improve their Japanese skills? In what ways do you think activities outside of class are important for learning Japanese?**

**Professor Itabashi:** The crucial factor in improving Japanese is becoming a language user rather than a student studying Japanese. Moreover, self-reflection on your Japanese language learning and becoming someone who uses metacognition to consider what they need is essential for improving language skills. As for extracurricular activities, it is important for students to do the things that they want to do. For example, rather than doing an activity for reasons such as job hunting, students should do something they want to do based on their own interests to be deeply rather than superficially involved.

**Q. Lee Dongmin-san, have you ever used the SALC? Also, how do you study Japanese outside of class?**

**Lee Dongmin:** I have used the SALC about three or four times. At that time, I received help checking my writing and improving my conversational skills through questions about the meaning of lines in a drama. Now that I want to be surrounded by Japanese as much as possible in my daily life, I read newspapers and listen to podcasts in Japanese. Comedy shows on YouTube are also really engaging, so I have a lot of fun learning new words and expressions. Also, I'm taking classes offered in

Japanese so I can certainly learn Japanese while studying the course content.

**Interviewer's Note:** The Language Festival is a 1-day event in which students from countries with small numbers at APU act as lecturers and introduce languages representing their cultures, histories, and values. The Language Festival event held on October 28th, 2023 marks the third time it has been held at APU.

**Q. Could you share about the Language Festival on October 28th, 2023?**

**Professor Itabashi:** This time, I ran the Language Festival together with an English language teacher, Professor Tomoko Eto, and Lee-san. I see Lee-san not as a student but a staff member that I respect while working on the same project. Being able to work with older people in a new language that you learned is wonderful, and I think Lee-san also



**APU Language Festival**

became much more confident by being able to work on this project and use Japanese.

**Lee Dongmin:** In this year's Language Festival, I was not in a student position, and I needed to teach and guide people as a core staff member. In a setting where I needed to explain things in Japanese, I found it difficult to explain things in a way that was easy to understand.

**Professor Itabashi:** In this sense, rather than doing something to use Japanese, I'm glad that "using Japanese while doing a project together" like at this language festival became a means to do the project. Also, although some people may feel intimidated to invite others to join an event because of a language barrier, I think it is lovely to have people like Lee-san be able to respond with the required language when necessary.



APU Language Festival

**Q. What was your motivation to take part in organizing the Language Festival?**

**Professor Itabashi:** I heard from Professor Eto that the Language Festival was being organized on the premise of having students from countries with small numbers at APU present their native languages to others as a chance to feel proud about their countries and languages. There are many opportunities in my Japanese class for students to present about various countries. Still, I

think there are few opportunities for these students to present outside of the language classroom, so I decided to take part in organizing the event.



**Lee Dongmin:** In 2022, I saw the announcement about the Language Festival on Campus Terminal and thought it looked interesting, so I joined as a staff member. After my experience as a staff member, I wanted more people to become interested in this event, so in 2023 I participated as a core staff member. In doing so, I wanted to challenge myself to see how well I could manage the event.

**Q. Your performance at the Language Festival as an MC was excellent. Which aspects were challenging when preparing to be an MC?**

**Lee Dongmin:** When Professor Itabashi checked my MC script, I had made many mistakes regarding words to use for talking in front of an audience. Specifically, I felt that the intonation of people's names and differentiating between the *kunyomi* (native Japanese reading) and *onyomi* (Chinese-derived reading) of the kanji characters were difficult. I thought these parts were tough and even though I wanted to practice, I felt like I was not yet up to the native level.

**Professor Itabashi:** But Lee-san's Japanese is very good. I rarely correct his Japanese in everyday conversations, but for speaking as an MC in front of people there were a few parts that were noticeable. Having the chance to talk with Lee-san about those points was a great opportunity.

## Part 3: Conclusion

**Q. Professor Itabashi, how do you increase students' motivation to study Japanese in general?**

**Professor Itabashi:** The best motivation for learning Japanese is to have fun with it. After all, learning new words and communicating with and understanding others is fun. Moreover, I heard from my students in the intermediate-level class that they were afraid to speak Japanese. However, I want them to have the courage to make mistakes and to try and speak, and to gradually build up enjoyable experiences.

**Q. Lee Dongmin-san, how do you maintain study habits?**

**Lee Dongmin:** In the Advanced Japanese class, I made a habit of actively participating in class discussions and raising my hand to speak to increase my chances of speaking Japanese. Moreover, I also tried to learn as much as possible in class. When there were words and expressions that I didn't understand, I took notes and later reviewed and memorized them.



APU Language Festival

**Q. Professor Itabashi, in your opinion, what is important in the process of Japanese language education?**

**Professor Itabashi:** At first, I thought the most important thing was introducing the new language successfully. However, I now think that encouraging students to learn voluntarily and creating a collaborative learning environment in class are some of the more important points. Therefore, rather than having a class format in which the teacher explains everything, I take on the format of having the students learn from one another. Also, to avoid putting pressure on students and to encourage them to speak Japanese, I have recently been trying several initiatives.

**Q: Specifically, what are some of those initiatives?**

**Professor Itabashi:** In the advanced-level class, I am doing a “Human Library” in which students share their personal experiences, such as their past concerns and struggles, as though they themselves are “books”. When organizing this class, it is divided into three groups: “book”



**Professor Itabashi, Lee Dongmin, and ALRCS members**

people, writers, and the audience. The writer group will summarize the “books” in an attractive way, the audience group will read the summaries and choose the “books” that they like and listen to the “books” to ask questions and interview them. Through this activity, I hope that students deepen their understanding of one another and feel that it is easier to be open about their own opinions and feelings in discussions going forward. The classmates students sit next to have all sort of opinions and pasts, and some students have responded in interviews that they were able to come closer to the contexts that produced those opinions.

**Q. Professor Itabashi, what do you expect from the students who take your class?**

**Professor Itabashi:** I hope that students at the intermediate level do not come to “dislike” the Japanese language. Since the Japanese Intermediate Course is mandatory, there are many students who are taking it because they must take it. I want to enable those students to have fun and be positive and to want to continue studying Japanese even after the course ends. For advanced-level students, I hope they learn about society using Japanese and try speaking with their friends. In particular, I would like them to learn about what Japanese students at APU are thinking not only by using daily Japanese, but by engaging in dialogue that enables an exchange of diverse values.

## INTERVIEWERS' IMPRESSIONS

### Interviewer & Author



**Name** : Kando Miu

**College** : APM

**Country:** Japan

**Impression:** This interview has left me with two impressions. First, it is essential that when learning languages, we should

apply the language in daily life. For that reason, I have also felt that it is important to talk in English with my friends daily and to become a language user. The second impression that this interview left on me is about Professor Itabashi's lesson in which she respected the students' wishes. Enabling the students to choose the content for research activities based on their own ideas can motivate them to learn Japanese and I think it is also an excellent opportunity to use Japanese to learn other subjects.

### Interviewer & Translator

**Name.** : NGUYEN Kieu Chi

**College.** : APM, Accounting & Finance

**Country:** Vietnam

**Impression:** This interview was my first time being involved in an all-Japanese interview. As a Japanese learner, I am glad to learn the different points of view from a Japanese teacher and her student. I am also highly impressed that both are so passionate about the language they are using, and would like to deliver that message to other Japanese learners as well. Professor Itabashi is always warm and considerate and is one of the most dedicated Japanese teachers I have met at APU. Lee-san is also highly motivated and has a close connection with the Japanese





## INTERVIEWERS' IMPRESSION

language, even though it is not his mother tongue. The Professor and student both have essential values when it comes to language learning:

1. Having fun and incorporating the language into daily life
2. Respecting others' points of view about language learning and not forcing opinions.
3. Genuinely caring about the language used and wanting to use it to deliver ideas (wanting to deliver personal ideas through the language)

Through this chance, I learned a lot from both the teacher and her student, motivating me to work on Japanese and become an excellent Japanese speaker.

### What is



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.