After finishing her undergraduate education in Belarus, Dr. Alena Neviarouskaya came to Japan for the first time. She entered graduate school at the University of Tokyo on a Japanese government scholarship, where she earned her master’s and PhD. Seeking further research experience, Dr. Neviarouskaya applied for a JSPS postdoctoral fellowship, under which she has been conducting research with her host researcher, Dr. Masaki Aono, in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at Toyohashi University of Technology since May 2011.

What are you currently researching under the JSPS fellowship?

My research theme is “Comprehensive exploration of attitudes in text: Textual attitude retrieval and analysis.” In appraisal theory, there are three high-level attitude types: Affect (a person’s emotional state, feeling, or reaction), judgment (ethical appraisal of person’s character, behavior, skills), and appreciation (aesthetic evaluation of semiotic and natural phenomena, events, objects). The main aims of my research are (1) developing a novel intelligent system for computational retrieval (search), analysis, and interpretation of attitudes expressed by people on the web (e.g., discussion forums, blogs, product or service reviews); (2) proposing methods for extracting deep-level information related to attitude, such as emotion experiencers or opinion holders, reasons behind expressed attitudes, causes and consequences; (3) developing society-beneficial and analytical applications driven by an attitude-sensing system.

How did you become interested in your research field?

My interest in this research field, which involves automatic analysis of people’s preferences, opinions, emotions and attitudes communicated through written language, emerged and gained strength during my master’s and doctoral studies in the Graduate School of Information Science and Technology at the University of Tokyo. My academic supervisor, Dr. Mitsuru Ishizuka, encouraged me to get involved in this research field as it provides an opportunity to combine computer science and linguistics with psycholinguistics, cognitive science, and emotion modeling. This broad spectrum of perspectives kindled my enthusiasm for conducting research in this interdisciplinary field.

How did you get to know your Japanese host researcher?

I found Dr. Masaki Aono through an Internet search. I learned that his laboratory conducts advanced and interesting research in the area of web and data mining. So, I started to communicate with him by email to discuss a proposal I had for conducting research under a JSPS fellowship. I was pleased that he agreed to host me, giving me an opportunity to work at Toyohashi University of Technology.

Why did you choose Japan to pursue your research?

When I was looking for a country to study in, Japan became my first priority as I knew it was recognized as a leader in technology, while offering an excellent academic environment with wide educational and research opportunities. I had been lucky to be awarded a Japanese government scholarship for my master’s and PhD studies. Therefore, it was quite natural for me to continue my research in Japan under the JSPS fellowship, building upon all the positive experiences I had gained in Japan to date.

What is your impression of your host institution?

Toyohashi University of Technology is a relatively new national university that promotes interdisciplinary, cutting-edge research and maintains strong ties with industry. I enjoy the atmosphere that fills our laboratory. It promotes creativity and freedom in pursuing our research ideas. Intelligent and kind laboratory members, comprising Japanese and international students, form a cohesive team comparable to a united family in which everyone feels comfortable. It is a great place for me to not only focus on my research, but also meet people from different cultural backgrounds and to participate in a variety of activities, such as sport competitions, camping, and barbecue parties.

Generally speaking, what is your impression of Japan’s research environment?

In my opinion, graduate schools in Japan are a good option for students and researchers who want to establish a strong academic record while acquiring unique research experience, one full of motivation and dynamism. The finest teams of professors, high standards of teaching, excellent class activities, modern laboratory equipment, interesting research topics, international environment, and opportunities to participate in international conferences and collaborate with other researchers—these are the most remarkable features of Japan’s research environment.

What are your research achievements under the JSPS fellowship so far?

As a JSPS researcher, I proposed a novel method for conducting an automatic analysis of sentiment word (adjective) relations with three attitude types: affect, judgment, and appreciation. Such a method will support analytical applications relying on recognition of fine-grained context-dependent attitudes conveyed in text. Based on sentences automatically collected for each adjective, the algorithm analyses the context of phrases that contain sentiment word by considering morphological tags, high-level concepts, and named entities; then, it makes decisions about contextual attitude labels. Finally, the appraisal potentials of each word are calculated based on the number of sentences related to each type of attitude. The results of this research were presented at the 24th International Conference on Computational Linguistics.

What do you do outside your research work?

Mostly, I spend my spare time with my family: my husband and our one and a half year old baby. Since we have fallen in love with Japanese nature and the traditional architecture of Japanese temples, our trips cover a significant part of weekends.

What do you think of life in Japan—its culture and customs?
I think that the fundamental principle of living in Japan lies in pursuit of harmony in everything. Politeness and respect are crucial for harmonious personal relationships in family and working environments. The traditional Japanese ceremonies and festivals are full of ritualistic and meaningful acts conducive to achieving harmony and inner peace. The kimono, with its gorgeous patterns and perfect combinations of forms and colors, are perceived as artworks worn on important occasions. The traditional viewing of cherry blossom in the spring and colorful leaves in the fall always brings harmony to the heart of the beholder, leaving pleasant memories. As to Japanese gardens that feature ponds, islands, bridges, waterfalls, stones and sand, I see them as being created in exquisite unity.

What do you plan to do after your fellowship ends?

I plan to find a position at an academic institution in Japan located preferably in the same prefecture where my husband, who is also from Belarus, is working. Currently he has a 5-year assistant professor appointment at Toyohashi University of Technology. I am hoping that our whole family can live together.

Please give some advice for young researchers who may be thinking about doing research in Japan.

My best tips for success in Japan are having passion for your research and respect for cultural diversity. It is sometimes difficult to jump into an entirely new environment, but by maintaining strong motivation to achieve your research goals, many of the obstacles will soon be overcome. I believe that experiencing Japan’s unique culture and customs will quickly turn into an enjoyable experience. These advantages of a JSPS fellowship should add a special stepping stone to your career path.

As seen in our interview with Dr. Neviarouskaya, she enjoys both her research and life in Japan. She told us that what boosts that enjoyment is the help and comradeship she receives from her host researcher, lab mates and the university’s staff. At the same time, we felt that her congenial personality is going a long way in creating the harmony she enjoys in her environment. We look forward with great expectation to her finding continued fulfillment in her research and life in Japan.