First Non-Native Speaking Japanese Language Instructor at SBU

In 2022, the Japanese Program at Stony Brook University achieved a significant milestone by welcoming its first non-Japanese instructor, Ms. Anne McNulty, to the team. While non-native speakers teaching European languages like French are common, they remain a rarity in other language programs such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Korean, and Russian. The notion of "nativeness" is often associated with a standardized version of a language, leading many to value native-speaking instructors. However, it is crucial to recognize that any named language exhibits diverse variations in pronunciation, intonation, grammar, and vocabulary based on region, social class, occupation, and even personality of its speaker. As a result, native speakers often bring their own regional and personal nuances to their language classroom. So, there is not much difference between native speakers and expert non-native speakers especially in the era of globalization, where many societies are already highly multilingual.

Non-native language teachers possess unique advantages, including the ability to objectively explain pronunciation, sentence formation, and language nuances in a way that resonates with language learners. Having navigated the challenges of learning the language themselves, they can predict and address the difficulties beginner students are likely to encounter, drawing from their own experiences to offer comprehensive and easily accessible guidance.

This is not to discredit native-speaking language teachers, as they too can excel when they invest time and effort in understanding the language's structure, cultural differences, and the specific needs and perspectives of their students. Emphasizing the importance of diverse teachers in each language program is crucial, as it allows for the sharing of unique strengths and perspectives. So, all Japanese instructors have warmly welcomed Ms. McNulty to join their team.

Ms. Anne McNulty is a co-author of "Japanese Stories for Language Learners" (Tuttle Publishing, 2018) and a former participant of the JET program, a prestigious position sponsored by the Japanese government. As a JET, she has taught English in public schools in Miyazaki Prefecture in Japan for three years. Her background in linguistics and Asian and Asian American Studies, coupled with her proficiency in Japanese and Korean, as well as her familiarity with French and Arabic, make her a valuable asset for SBU. She serves as a teacher who can effectively bridge the gap between research and teaching.

Ms. McNulty's passion for Japanese pop music and her involvement in various activities, such as the Japan Center's Essay Competition sponsored by Cannon USA, reflect her dedication to supporting her students' learning journey. Feedback from her students highlights her understanding of individual learning paces and her willingness to patiently explain concepts until they are fully grasped. Ms. McNulty says, "Being able to relate to my students and use my experiences to help them has been incredibly rewarding."

Moving forward, it is imperative to continue promoting diversity among language instructors in various programs. By doing so, we can tap into the collective strengths of both native and non-native teachers, fostering a more enriching and effective language learning environment for all students. Ms. Anne McNulty's role as the first non-native speaking language instructor at SBU represents a significant step in this direction, exemplifying the university's commitment to inclusive and comprehensive language education.