AN ASTONISHINGLY HIGH percentage of dwellers in South Louisiana parishes speak and understand French, according to a preliminary 18-parish survey conducted by the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL).

The figures, contained in the current issue of the bilingual "Acadiana Profile," reveal that an incredible 99 per cent of Evangeline Parish residents speak French, with 98 per cent in Avoyelles, 95 per cent in Vermilion, on down to a minimal 20 per cent in Orleans and Jefferson.

The 18 parishes surveyed are mainly situated where most of the descendants of French and Acadian inhabitants originally settled, and represent a census estimated to exceed two million inhabitants, with 868,400 persons speaking and understanding French.

(We assume that English is still the tongue of most of the French-speaking inhabitants).