Newcomers Learn How to "Parlez Vous", Lafayette Style, In French Classes

by Mary Alice Fontenot
Advertiser Society Reporter

"I had to learn it in self-defense," quipped Homer Solanas, when asked why he wanted to learn to speak French.

Mr. Solanas, a chief engineer, formerly of New Orleans, is a member of a French conversation class taught by Miss Lucille Coumes.

"Seriously, however," Mr. Solanas continued, "I want to learn French because I am now in a French-speaking community, and would like to be able to communicate with those who speak only French."

Miss Coumes, a member of the faculty of N. P. Moss school, has been conducting classes in French conversation for five years. The classes, started in response to a request by a group of geologists from the Oil Center, are a part of the Adult Education program of Lafayette parish, under the supervision of Gladu Dupuis.

Herself a member of a Spanish conversation class, Miss Coumes says, "I teach English by day and French by night." She uses a textbook, and will carefully explain French grammar if her students so request, but the program is specifically aimed at teaching French as it is spoken in Southwest Louisiana.

Ca Va

For example, students are taught to answer to the greeting, "Comment allez-vous?" but also learn that in the Lafayette area, they will most likely be greeted with "Comment ça va?" which is considered colloquial, but is also good French, Miss Coumes says.

The classes in French conversation are held each Friday night in N. P. Moss school from September until the end of May, but students may enroll at any time. Miss Coumes said there is no charge for the lessons. Two friends, who are "graduate" students, Mrs. James A. Bourg and Mrs. Louis Michot Sr., help with recruiting students for the class.

Mrs. Bourg, who has attended the classes for all of the five years she is taking a "part-time graduate course." Mrs. Michot is taking the course for the second year as a hobby, and for practice purposes.

Depends On Opportunity

Some students learn faster than others. Miss Coumes says, depending on the opportunity they have to use the French they have learned in class. Pronunciation is the stumbling block for most people who are not accustomed to hearing French spoken, she said.

Other members of the classes now in progress summarized their interest in learning French as follows:

Duncan Smith, attorney, formerly of North Louisiana: "I need it for practical purposes."

Mrs. Duncan Smith: "I'm going along with my husband, and I'm also interested in the language because my sister is a student at the Sorbonne."

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Foreign Travel

Mrs. Louise P. Rhodes, secretary, native of Minnesota: "I like languages, and someday my husband and I hope to go to Europe."

Jimmie Moore, geophysicist, formerly of Carthage, Tex.: "I've lived here since 1938, and after coming in contact with residents of the area who speak French, I decided I wanted to learn to speak it."

Mrs. Jimmie Moore, a native of Arkansas: "I'm going along with my husband, I don't want him to get ahead of me."

Mrs. Robert S. Young, housewife, formerly of Los Angeles, Calif.: "I want to be able to appreciate the French language while we're living here, and also there is always the possibility of foreign travel."

Robert S. Young, geologist: "This is my first lesson, I came here out of curiosity to find out what my wife was learning, decided to try it out myself."

Bill Simma, drilling contractor and SLL student, from Oklahoma: "Knowing French should be a practical help in my business. Most of my fellow employees are French, and a lot of our business dealing is in French."

Hugh Moore, district geologist, from Kentucky: "I had French two years ago in college, but I didn't learn to speak it. Taking this course will help me in business here."

Mrs. Hugh Moore, housewife, and organist, formerly of Ohio: "I had never heard French spoken before. We live in Lafayette very much and feel that we could appreciate it more if we knew French."

Challenge To Learn

Bryan Butler, insurance agent, formerly of Shreveport: "My fellow workers, friends and neighbors all speak French. It is a challenge to learn the language."

Mrs. Ted Moore, housewife, formerly of Kansas: "I think French is a beautiful and interesting language. We spoke here once before, and when we moved away, I missed hearing French spoken. I'm glad we're back. I'm teaching what I learned here to my four children."

Other members of the class, absent at the time of the interview, are Dr. Carroll Norden, SLIF faculty, and Mrs. Norden; Donald Smith, student, and Mrs. Smith, a registered nurse; Bob Edge, geologist, and Mrs. Edge; Mrs. Lillian Nigh, R. N., Jack Jackson, sign painter; Terry Grove, landman; Rudolph Young Jr., oil scout, and Mrs. Betty Frank.