

Refugees take big first step

Stories and photos
by Lucinda Chodan

"Nothing is the same — it's all different."

That's Yen's summary of the problems of learning English. Yen is a Vietnamese student in one of the Faculty of Extension's special English classes for Southeast Asian refugees.

For Vietnamese immigrants to Alberta, language is an enormous barrier. The English as a Second Language (ESL) courses at the Faculty of Extension are part of the university's response to the problem.

Ruth Pearce, director of the ESL program, says a university committee studying the plight of the Southeast Asian refugees created the program this fall.

"Dr. Horowitz (university president) formed the committee to see what the university could do to help. ESL was

one of the things they decided on."

The two-week English courses began December 3. Each one provides the refugees with forty hours of free classroom instruction over a two-week period.

Courses in intermediate and advanced levels of conversation and writing were planned initially, but the writing section was dropped because of low enrollment. Pearce says the lack of interest in the course and refugees' specific problems have modified the initial plans.

"Now, we simply do what is necessary," she says.

The program doesn't take beginners — students who speak no English at all. Those refugees are enrolled in other ESL classes, mainly at Alberta Vocational Centre and St. Catherine's school. The students in the Faculty of Extension classes all have some experience with English.

English is problem-laden for the Vietnamese. Unlike many European languages, Vietnamese has no cognates in English — words that are the same or very similar in both languages. Grammar and sentence structure vary widely in the two languages.

And even when all those problems are faced, there is pronunciation. The final consonants in Vietnamese are not pronounced, so all the students have problems pronouncing the endings of English words. English also contains sounds that don't exist in Vietnamese.

The task of teaching the refugees English is made harder by the fact that most of them are employed at least part-time. For some of them, classes come just before an eight-hour shift as chambermaids in a downtown hotel. Pearce says jobs cut in to the time available for learning English.

"Some of them may learn English at their jobs, but you don't learn much English as a chambermaid."

The Faculty of Extension has applied to the provincial government for funds to continue the program. If approved, the two-week course will continue until March 1981.



English class is not always hard work and study.



Instructor Sue Innes makes a point.

The proverbial English lesson

How do you know what to teach? Sue Innes is frank about her program for her students.

"Well, the first day I had them tell me about themselves, to sort of break the ice."

"The second day, I came in with some exercises."

The students, notebooks and Vietnamese-English dictionaries in hand, arrive at 9:00 a.m. every morning at Corbett Hall for their four-hour English session. The lessons vary each day, but vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and idiom exercises are interspersed with singing Canadian folk songs and slides of Canada.

"How do you come to class every morning?" Sue asks. "What time do you leave, how do you get here?" As the students respond, she corrects their pronunciation and teaches them the difference between expressions like "come here" and "get there."

She also uses the exercises to explain some Canadian customs. "I come to work every morning by car... One morning I drive, and one morning my neighbour drives. Does anyone

know what this is called?"

After the topic of car pools has been worked over, the exercise ends with a discussion about the cheapest places to buy gas in Edmonton.

The first two hours of the day's lesson also includes exercises on pluralization, object pronouns, short speeches and a session with English proverbs.

"A rolling stone gathers no moss. Do you know what moss is?" Sue asks.

Then she finds a Vietnamese word for moss, and the class nods eagerly. Sue uses her chalk to demonstrate what rolling is.

"This proverb has a wider meaning, though," she says. "For people, moss is like friends, your favorite thing, old family dishes... what do you think this proverb means for people?"

The class nods again, understandingly this time, as they discuss the proverb further.

The discussion ends with the students enthusiastically chorussing the familiar proverbs they have already studied.

"Too many cooks..."

Faculty of Science

Award for Excellent Teaching

Beginning this year, the Faculty of Science will formally recognize its outstanding teachers by conferring the 'Faculty of Science Award for Excellent Teaching'. Only one award will be given each year, and previous recipients will be excluded from further competition. Each department, through its Chairman, may nominate one person each year. Moreover, any group of ten undergraduate students in the Faculty of Science may submit nominations for the award to the Chairman of the Award Selection Committee (Office, Dean of Science), which consists of four academic staff and four undergraduate students.

Nominations are hereby invited for this new award and should be submitted no later than March 18th, 1980. Nominees should have held a professorial appointment in the Faculty for at least ten years and should have a reputation among their colleagues and students for excellent teaching.



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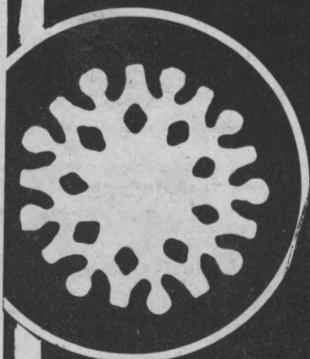
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