

Claire Darmstadter

Hey everybody, I'm joined today by Caty Strait, a UW-Milwaukee student studying to go into French education. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

Caty Strait

No problem.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, so be first great if you could just share a little bit about your linguistic and educational background and how you learn French and why you might be choosing to pursue this particular career.

Caty Strait

So, very interesting, I just wrote a paper about this for a class. The first time I ever learned French was actually when I was five years old, I took a summer school class, very simply in the morning. And that was kind of my first introduction into the language. And then when it came to sixth grade, our school district has us take a semester of French and a semester of Spanish, and the same for seventh grade. But in eighth grade, you get to choose what language you want to take. All my older siblings also took French and I really enjoyed the language and it made so much more sense to me than Spanish. So I decided to take French and that's kind of where I started. But why I decided to go into it was I had a really awesome teacher in high school. And she helped me do this CIEE program and I got to go spend a month in Toulouse, France, during the summer, which was my first time studying abroad. It was in between my junior and senior year, and it kind of was that tipping point for me where I was like, *Yes, this is what I want to do.*

Claire Darmstadter

Most definitely, I'm very jealous of how robust language and education degrees are at Milwaukee, both primary and secondary level. I know elementary Spanish programs and classes are pretty common, but it's a bit harder to find that for French. So are you thinking about going the elementary route or are you perhaps kind of forced to go into secondary because that's where the jobs are?

Caty Strait

I have no preference, currently, where I would like to teach, I find that there's definitely benefits to wherever you end up. I am the person where I think I don't know if I'll end up in elementary because as you said, there's not a ton of French elementary out there. But I would love to do it still. But I still am just like, I could see myself teaching either middle school or high school.

Claire Darmstadter

And are you thinking of staying in Wisconsin, or maybe going somewhere else, or what seems to be the most hospitable environment for French education teachers?

Caty Strait

I personally just don't want to stay in Wisconsin anymore. So after I graduate, I want to do this TAPIF program, which is a teaching assistant program in France, where I'll get to go over and be a TA in an English classroom. And it's a one to two year program. And after I'm done with that, I just sounds like a good time to just reset life and figure out where I want to teach and I can go anywhere.

Claire Darmstadter

And at Milwaukee, are there any classes or programs or student orgs, or cohorts or any sort of group, you're part of other world language educators or something along those lines that have been really beneficial to your French or your teaching skills or development?

Caty Strait

They're currently not accepting applications for the National Honors French society, which is very sad. But I just have a really good connection with most of the French students here. It's a very small group so we end up taking all the classes together. And so we're a really strong group and I have good friends here. Also, the teachers are very supportive and that's very awesome. We have the French film festival, which was actually just a couple weeks ago, maybe it was last week? It was last week. But they have this thing called Circle Table where it's about, well they used to when COVID didn't exist, um, but it was normally twice a week, it's about an hour, and it's just somewhere where you can go in and just speak the language and practice.

Claire Darmstadter

And we are kind of chatting about this a little bit last week when we were at a language education conference. But the switch to online classes as a result of COVID has made things particularly difficult for people who are going into language or teaching or anything associated with that. So are there been some ways that you've been able to kind of supplement to make the situation a little bit less difficult or to kind of get around some of the barriers that COVID has created?

Caty Strait

In a language aspect, I feel like I'm at the point in my education where I'm in, I'm in my 400-level classes. So like we all know French. And so, there hasn't been a lot of moments where they talked about just letting it go. There's a lot of moments when our teacher lets it go. And that's also okay, because it's really important to stay in the target language as much as possible. I feel like classes have been a lot different, but I'm not sure if it's how this teacher just formats his classes, because now I've had him for two semesters, and he's been my online teacher. And he does a lot of literature and then discussion. I'd love to understand how other classes are working. I know my roommate was in a French grammar class. And she said it was really difficult, but they did their small meetings, and they try to explain as best as possible. And it just wasn't as interactive as when I took the class the previous semester, I took it the previous semester when I was in person. And we constantly were up and moving and doing stuff and writing stuff online, it's very much a whole entire change. And I feel like the thing about language is it's very interactive learning, like you put your whole entire body into it. And it makes it so much more fun. And it just helps you kind of click because you're like, our teachers are

really good about trying to use all the types of learning. So they'll use the visual, they'll use the kinesthetic, and they'll use the verbal. So I think that's where online learning has very much become a lot harder, because you can't physically implement all the types of learning. And it's harder to fully engage when you're just sitting in front of a computer. So I think it's definitely been hard. But I know that there's a ton of teachers out there working as hard to try to close the gap and make it work.

Claire Darmstadter

That is so important to remember. Finally, can you just give me one reason, if you can boil it down to one, why we should view language learning and speaking more than one language as a superpower, and you can answer English or French or mix of two or whatever is best for you.

Caty Strait

I think learning another language is awesome. Personally, I think it's cool to be able to like speak to a whole nother culture of people. I hate the ideology that everyone should know English. And then I just feel a lot more comfortable when I travel knowing that I know another language and people from another country seeing effort from that. And I feel like they really enjoy that. I think it makes traveling a lot easier because I've heard travel stories from people who are just like, *oh, they were so mean to me*. That's just like, yeah, you don't know the language. And you didn't even try. I feel like and I yeah, I feel like that's the like big thing when traveling is that when you know more languages, they're a lot more kind to you. But I also, I think my favorite part about knowing a language and a lot of people are just like, why are you taking French over Spanish and it's, it's not about the language. It's about what you love. And I loved French more than I loved Spanish and I do want to learn more languages eventually, I just kind of get through French first. I think one of my favorite things is that I could slip into French and talk with my friends and know that no one else knows what I'm saying at all. It's just like, that's our little secret.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. Well, thank you so much for chatting with me. I love getting the French perspective because like you mentioned there's tons of Spanish and that's incredible, but also sometimes you miss out on some of these other languages. So thank you so much and I hope you have a great rest of your school doing the best we can within everything that's going on in the world.

Caty Strait

You too Claire