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## Foreign Trend Is Talk of the Town

If radio talk show host Barry Farber has his finger on the right pulse, he just may turn out to be the Jane Fonda of languages.

Farber is the founder of The Language Club, which he started a little more than a year ago. "It's the next rung in the self-improvement ladder," he said. "After you've got the right jogging outfit and you've switched from whiskey to Perrier, you should learn another language or two."

Seeing is believing — and in this case listening is convincing. And the fact that almost 100 New Yorkers turned up at an East Side French restaurant on a dark, stormy evening last week to tune up their lan-

guage skills over meatballs and pasta indicates that Farber may be on the cutting edge of still another trend.

The guests, each of whom had paid \$10 for a buffet supper, talked to each other in Chinese, Russian, Yiddish and Hungarian — not to mention the garden variety languages of French, Spanish and Italian.

All are members of what must be regarded as one of the city's more offbeat clubs, the brainchild of the 55-year-old Farber, who has been

the loquacious talk show host at radio station WMCA since 1978 and who unsuccessfully ran on the Republican line for Congress in 1970 and on the Conservative line for mayor in 1977, the year Edward I. Koch was elected.

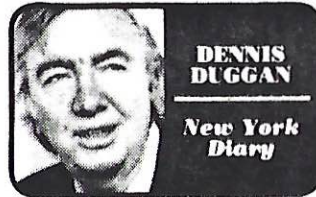
Farber is a transplanted North Carolinian who early in life discovered he had a gift for languages and who brushed up those gifts as an Army translator during World War II. He described himself as a "student" of 14 languages.

"It sounds arrogant to say I am

fluent in that many languages, and besides who knows when some twerp just back from a Fulbright scholarship isn't going to hit me with an idiomatic expression I've never heard before?" he said.

Farber emphasized that his club is not a cover-up for a chance to meet singles. "It's definitely not a singles club although I won't blow the whistle if a guy and a girl who've never met walk out together after the meeting," he said. "What makes this different is that when you add language as a requirement for membership you weed out a lot of the bums who show up at singles affairs."

Clubs and associations are com-  
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DENNIS  
DUGGAN

New York  
Diary

## Foreign Trend Is Talk of Town

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monplace in the city. There are clubs for almost every taste, ranging from whist to motorbiking. But when Farber mentioned the idea over his radio show, he got enough response to start the club and now — to his amazement — "We're even making a profit."

He said about 7,500 members have come to the meetings, which are held eight times a week at various restaurants, and he is thinking about starting up clubs for people who speak Hebrew or French or German. At last week's four-hour affair, members were offered short-wave radios at discount prices along with foreign-language tapes and records and discounts at language schools like Berlitz.

"It's a disgrace to speak just one language," said Farber, who is well aware that because English is the international language "by a landslide," there may not be much incentive for Americans to learn a foreign language. "For many of us, of course, a foreign language is simply another hurdle to get over toward getting a degree," he said.

At last week's session, jet-set hair stylist George Michael, who speaks fluent Russian, mingled with people like Ciro (Jerry) Masino, a retired Boy Scout executive who speaks Italian. "Boy, did we need something like this," Masino said. "Alex Haley wrote 'Roots,' and for a lot of us the languages our parents spoke are our roots."

In a corner of the room people sang French and Italian folk songs. At tables marked by signs indicating a particular language, others sat and chatted. Here you heard the soft sibilants of the romance languages; there the harsher sounds of German and Dutch, a language Farber said that sounds as "though your mouth was wrapped over the exhaust pipe of a Greyhound bus."

Alexandra Rodrigues, who heads the newly formed Long Island chapter, said she joined the club "because a foreign language makes you more interesting and it's the next thing to traveling abroad."

Marie Arena, a computer programmer for E.F. Hutton, said: "I'm a shy person and it helps to speak in another language."

"We call ourselves 'linguathusiasts,'" said Rodrigues, a flight attendant with Pan American, shaking hands with Phyllis Lind.

"I sing in ten languages," said Lind, listening intently while Michaels, who studied at the Naval Military Academy in Leningrad, told her how her hair should be shaped.

At the end Farber, who speaks with a southern drawl, rose to tell of the two mice trapped by a ravenous cat and with no chance of escaping.

One of the mice said "bow wow," and with that the cat ran away. "That's the advantage of knowing a second language," said Farber.