

# Interpretation and translation :

*point of view of Mr. EDMUND GLENN*

The problems posed by our acceptance of bilingualism are attracting the attention of active minds in our country. The exchange of ideas in the transaction of daily business, and more especially at conferences between Cameroonians of English and French expressions always presents problems. These problems may be summarised in two words — Interpretation and translation.

In the maiden issue of ABBIA, Mr. J. A. Kisob saw the possibility of pidgin English becoming an official language for our new nation. His suggestions were not without foundation.

Keenly interested in these problems, Dr. Bernard Fonlon, *Chargé de Mission* at the Presidency of the Federal Republic, held discussions with Mr. Edmund Glenn, Chief of the Interpreting Branch, Division of Language services at the State Department in Washington, D. C. when he accompanied President Ahidjo on an official visit to the United States of America. Mr. Glenn has been kind to communicate the main lines of their policy in the field of language services which we are giving hereunder in paraphrase :

## Interpreting and Translating

Oral interpreting and written translations are two different professions. While it is desirable to have all interpreters also trained as translators, in order to increase flexibility, and while it is desirable for the same reason, to have interpreting and translating joined organisationally, recruiting for the two fields should be separate. This is due in particular to a great temperamental difference that exists in general between people suited to one or the other aspects of linguistic work. Translators must be patient and painstaking; interpreters must be fast and ready to assume initiative. It is rare that the two types of qualifications are joined in the same man.

## Recruiting

Interpreting in particular requires, in addition to a thorough knowledge of the languages involved and a superior educational background, a specific ability or « *knack* ». Interpreting techniques may be learned

by other equally intelligent people, equally qualified from the linguistic and educational point of view. Under such circumstances, the first step in recruitment is to select individuals possessing the necessary aptitude and background. Training in techniques is a second step.

It may happen that the testing of candidates may uncover people having the necessary aptitude, but whose linguistic level is not quite satisfactory. If no fully qualified candidates are available, it is better to try to improve the linguistic level of such candidates, than to try training in techniques candidates who are linguistically but not temperamentally suited to interpreting.

#### Interpreting Techniques - Simultaneous and Consecutive

The two main interpreting techniques, simultaneous and consecutive, have each their field of usefulness. Simultaneous is particularly well adapted to large meetings and to providing services to bodies of a continuing nature — such as, for example, our Federal National Assembly.

Consecutive is preferable in small but very important meetings and in those in which negotiations of a difficult nature are conducted. Contrary to the opinion prevalent outside of professional circles, it is easier to find interpreters having a good aptitude for simultaneous than interpreters capable of consecutive at the highest level. It is, of course, preferable that all interpreters should be capable of working in both techniques; but it may be expected, however, that only half of those recruited may master consecutive. Interpreting services half of whose members are fully qualified in consecutive while all can perform satisfactorily in simultaneous may be considered sufficiently balanced.

#### Numbers

Bilingual conferences likely to meet for a fairly long period of time require four interpreters for simultaneous — two working into English and two working into French. Committee meetings of a somewhat less formal nature need in general, three interpreters. The total number of interpreters who might be needed can be calculated on the basis of the number of meetings that are likely to be held at the same time.

It should be noted that the interpreting load is heavier into the language less usually spoken on the floor. In the case of Cameroon, this means a heavier load from French into English than from English into French, given the proportion of each language in the Federal National Assembly.

#### Training

Mr. Glenn believes that a fully qualified and properly preselected candidate can be trained in three months. The training of candidates having the necessary aptitude but whose background is insufficient, either from the point of view of linguistic knowledge or from that of necessary background in economics, political science and general culture, may call for a three-year effort.

It is the opinion of Mr. Glenn's organisation that very intensive training of fully qualified candidates is more likely to produce good results, from the point of view of cost and time, than longer training starting at a lower level of proficiency. The choice between the two is, however, in the first place, a matter of availability of candidates. It goes without saying that in either case, the training must be placed in the hands of fully qualified instructors with complete experience in the field.

#### Experience

As in any other professional field, an interpreter or translator fresh out of school is not yet at the peak of his ability. Experience on the job is necessary. A basic guideline in this respect is that translators — provided they have the necessary background and linguistic qualifications — need less technical training but even more experience and training « on the job » than do interpreters. It is for this reason that this report concentrates primarily on describing the interpreting side of the picture.

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