

9.2. LANGUAGE TRAINING AND THE ASSIGNMENT PROCESS

THE PROBLEM

Training in the secretary's second official language is usually not strengthened by, or followed up in, the assignment process.

DISCUSSION

There is a clear perception on the part of anglophone secretaries, especially, that their opportunities for advancement and for interesting assignments are increasingly limited due to the requirement to be functionally bilingual. Language training, although personally valuable and rewarding, is viewed as an assembly line process geared to turning out, as quickly as possible, graduates whose knowledge of the second official language is minimal and, certainly, rarely functional. Invariably, language school graduates are subsequently assigned to divisions or posts where use of the secretary's first official language is required. This is particularly true of anglophone so-called bilingual secretaries. No doubt, this scenario is common to nearly all graduates of the language schools.

As it relates to foreign service secretaries, however, the problems created by language training and the subsequent failure to strengthen further that training through appropriate assignments should be recognized. The practice of assigning officially bilingual anglophone secretaries only to anglophone positions severely limits their rotationality and opportunity for interesting assignments. While the problem is not acute among junior secretaries, it is becoming noticeable among senior secretaries.

Since most, if not all, ambassadors want bilingual secretaries, the opportunities for posting become more and more limited at the senior levels. Bilingual secretaries are required at francophone posts and at anglophone posts headed by a francophone officer. They are also highly sought after