

Language SpecializationLanguage Qualifications

From time to time the question was raised in Parliament and elsewhere as to whether Canadian diplomats in foreign countries were expected to know the language of the countries where they served.

The old British practice had been to have senior diplomatic representatives and Heads of Mission chosen and appointed irrespective of their linguistic knowledge of foreign vernaculars, although a few great diplomats, such as several appointed to Turkey, China, etc., became linguistic experts in their fields. In general, however, while language knowledge was an asset in their qualifying examinations, the senior Ambassadors relied on their assistants, their "language-secretaries", or, in the Levant, their dragomans, for the local language, together with indigenous interpreters. In the British Consular Service, on the other hand, which had its Levant Service, its China Service, etc., the chief officers were specially trained in the regional language. While not in all cases essential, in the British Service, a specialized knowledge of a foreign language (e.g. Persian, Arabic, Slavonic, etc.) was, generally speaking, an asset and an additional qualification for a post; either a pre-knowledge aided a candidate for appointment, or a selected candidate, after recruitment, was assigned to take a course of language training, in a selected field of specialization.

The Canadian Government, prior to 1940, rarely