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THE LANGUAGES OF CANADIAN DIPLOMACY

A Statement by the Honourable Mitchell Sharp,
Secretary of State for External Affairs, to
Officers of the Department of External Affairs,
Ottawa, August 26, 1968.

It gives me great pleasure to meet you today, particularly at this seminar on the languages of Canadian diplomacy. I attach particular importance to this first contact with you. This meeting serves two objectives:

- (1) While enabling me to welcome to our Department the new 1968 class of young officers, it also gives me the opportunity to meet last year's group.
- (2) It enables me to explain my views and my position, as Minister of External Affairs, on the important subject of bilingualism within our Department....

You will no doubt be familiar with the statement made by Mr. Pearson in the House of Commons in April 1966 on bilingualism in the Public Service of Canada. Let me say at the outset that the guide-lines set forth in that statement remain an important part of the Government's policy on bilingualism in Canada and that I, for my part, will do my best to see that they are implemented in our Department.

I do not intend to review Mr. Pearson's statement in detail today.... Nevertheless, some of the main points are worthy of special attention because of their implications for all members of the Department, and particularly for officers starting out on a career in the government service. In describing the Government's goals in this field, Mr. Pearson noted that within a reasonable period of time it was the Government's objective to realize four basic and very significant steps in the public service:

- (1) That as a matter of practice all internal communications whether oral or written should take place in either English or French, depending on the language of the person concerned;
- (2) that all communications with the public should normally be in either language as appropriate;

- (3) that in matters of recruitment and training the values of both linguistic communities be given full weight; and, finally,
- (4) that it should be a general objective to create a climate in which civil servants of both linguistic groups can work together towards common goals, using their own language, and on the basis of their own cultural values, while at the same time appreciating those of the other linguistic community.

I shall return in a few moments to the implications of these objectives for the foreign service. I should underline here, however, that they are not merely, or even primarily, a matter of achieving impressive statistics with respect to the percentage of fluent English- or French-speakers. They relate rather to the fundamental human concern of ensuring that every Canadian, and particularly those in the employ of the Federal Government, can feel fully at home working in his own language.

I said at a luncheon of the Reform Club in Montreal, when I was Minister of Finance, that "the aim of the present Government is to give every Canadian the right to express himself in either French or English and be understood when he deals with his Federal Government, at least in the capital of the country", I also went further, stating that "for the first time Canadians whose mother tongue is French will be able to compete on an equal footing with English-speaking Canadians". It is clear that these goals are of particularly fundamental importance within the Government service itself.

My immediate concern as Minister of External Affairs, and yours as members of the Department, must be to ensure that they are met as fully and as rapidly as possible both in Ottawa and abroad. For this reason, our Department anticipates meeting two important dead-lines in the Government's declaration of principles, which means that, by 1970 in the case of appointments from outside the service and by about 1975 in the case of promotions, bilingual proficiency or a willingness to acquire it at Government expense within a reasonable time, will normally be required.

For this reason also, the Department has established a number of practical procedures designed to develop a comprehensive approach to bilingualism in the foreign service. These procedures are already beginning to bear fruit. Last year's figures show that, among our foreign service and administrative officers, 28 per cent can be classed as bilingual, and a further 20 per cent have a good knowledge of both languages. It is also estimated that, during the past year alone, one-fifth of all departmental employees attended language courses.

These accomplishments must, however, be seen against the broader background of the basic requirements of Canadian foreign policy. If you read carefully the White Paper Federalism and International Relations and its supplement Federalism and International Conferences on Education, you will recognize that one of the main purposes for writing these papers was to outline the steps being taken by the Federal Government to frame and implement a policy which meets the requirements of the two major linguistic communities in Canada. In that way, the White Papers contribute to constructive consideration and

discussion of the implementation of the Canadian system in the field of international relations. They also provide an opportunity for an examination, not only by experts but by the public at large, which can only serve to enhance Canadian unity and the interests of all Canadian citizens.

Canadian foreign policy must not only be consonant with the interests of Canadians across the country but must also take account of our distinctive Canadian cultural and linguistic heritage. Thus, in framing and implementing foreign policy, the Canadian Government must recognize the traditions which both French- and English-speaking Canadians seek to maintain and develop within the fabric of the Canadian federation. Accordingly, it must be based upon equal status for the two official languages across the range of operations of the Department of External Affairs. It must also promote the interests of all Canadians of both major linguistic communities. Particularly in the projection of the Canadian character abroad, it implies that Canada must make a special effort to establish a proper balance by increasing its relations with francophone countries not only in Africa, where our programme has been stepped up, but also in Asia and in Europe. It also entails pursuing the effort which is already under way to reinforce and promote the use of our two official languages in international organizations and agencies. This we are doing.

At the same time, if our intention is to create a climate and conditions which will enable every officer to serve his country in either of the official languages, we must continue to encourage the use of the officer's own language as a working tool and to ensure that both English- and French-speaking officers have a sufficient knowledge of the two languages to be able to comprehend each other in day-to-day working situations. Especially in the performance of their duties abroad, our officers should be a living illustration of the Canadian linguistic duality. They must also meet the requirements of their fellow citizens travelling outside Canada.

All this means in practice that in our Department and others concerned with Canadian activities abroad there is a particularly striking need for officers to be competent in both official languages. We therefore have to be very sure that this need is being met as effectively as possible. I think your presence here today, together with representatives from other departments which share in the important task of representing Canadian interests abroad, testifies to the importance which all of us attach to this task.

Over the past few years we have, in fact, accomplished a good deal towards translating the principles of bilingualism into practice. Our recruitment of junior officers, as you know, has been particularly successful in terms of their ability to work in the two official languages. We have also been fortunate in recent years in being able to bring about a substantial increase in the proportion of new officers speaking French as their mother tongue. In the last three years, close to one-third of the new entrants have been French-speaking. Because these groups, taken together, involve some 140 officers, they have improved the linguistic balance in the service as a whole. This is of vital significance, for bilingualism cannot possibly flourish unless both groups are well represented.

In promoting this policy, it is important to keep in mind that French-Canadian diplomats, in the same way as English-speaking officers, should be assigned to a great variety of functions in all our missions and divisions. It is not the policy of the Department to have one or other group specialize in

particular fields, or particular geographical areas, to the exclusion of others. There should be no functional or geographical area where either French- or English-speaking officers cannot be asked to serve. This in itself will entail for the future a solid competence in both languages for all our officers.

Some recent developments in departmental practice will perhaps give you a more graphic idea of the effort we are pursuing. You are aware, for example, of our language-training programme. It is still not entirely adequate, but it has begun to make its contribution to the general level of proficiency in the two official languages. To improve this proficiency, the government school of languages is now in the process of testing all officers to determine their rating in order to facilitate future training of the individual officer. An increasing proportion of our stenographers are bilingual. Any of you who has ever tried to draft a memorandum or a telegram in French will know what an important advance this represents.

Last year, following the recommendations of an ad hoc departmental committee on bilingualism, regulations covering the use of the official languages were included in our departmental Manual of Procedures. The two languages have been set on an equal footing where transmission of general policy information to our posts abroad is concerned. Concrete results have been obtained in devising and publicizing equivalent terminology in the two languages for a wide range of common expressions, which are in everyday use in the Department. It is worthy of note that the Manual of Procedures not only stresses the importance of performing a substantial part of your duties in your own language; it gives detailed directives concerning the procedures which we wish to put into practice. Supervising officers are advised that they should encourage both French- and English-speaking officers working under their direction to use their own language as a working language. This is of the highest importance, to my mind, for it is not sufficient to accept bilingualism "in principle" if it is not encouraged on a day-to-day basis at all levels of the service.

With regard to written communications in particular, the regulations make plain that, in preparing documents designed for use within the Government, both in Ottawa and at posts, drafting officers shall be free to choose the language to be used in their drafts. Documents destined for use outside the federal administration will be prepared in the addressee's language.

I should also draw attention to the recent appointment of a departmental bilingual adviser.... In order to ensure continuity in his and our efforts, a permanent advisory committee on bilingualism has also been set up.

I might mention other developments. For example, the wives of our diplomatic officers are now entitled to learn their second official language either in Canada or abroad at public expense within the limits of the availability of funds and of teaching facilities. We are also in the process of improving the supply to our divisions in Ottawa and our posts abroad of basic reference books in the two official languages.

These measures, and others you will hear about in the next two days, show that the efforts of the Department are not based on a purely theoretical approach but involve well-planned, practical solutions. All this is impressive, I think, as tangible evidence of our willingness to move ahead. We cannot afford to be complacent, however. Much more remains to be done if we are to live

up to our commitments; there is a formidable list of problems on which we are or shall be working.

We want the new policies to be better known throughout the Department so that all members are fully aware of their responsibilities. We want a higher proportion of French-speaking members, for we must not blind ourselves to the fact that bilingualism, as important as it is, will not in itself solve the problem of ensuring greater participation in government by members of the two linguistic communities. Only an adequate number of individuals belonging to each group, both in Ottawa and in our missions abroad, will guarantee the realization of our goals. We also need a supporting staff which will be linguistically equipped to assist in carrying out these policies. We want a communications system which will facilitate, not hamper, communications in both languages.

In brief, we want French-speaking Canadians to make greater use of their language as a living instrument. We do not want our linguistic investment to go to waste. The Government and the Department can go only so far in assisting individuals in their attempts to master their second language. Thereafter it will be for each individual concerned to ensure that he develops his potential to the maximum.

To some this outline may sound like a dream; in fact, these policies are already being put into practice. They have been adopted because we believe them to be essential to the life and progress of this country, and essential, on a smaller scale, to the effective functioning of this Department. I can assure you that all steps will be taken to carry them out promptly.

For all these reasons, the Department is anxious to encourage young people of both cultures who are interested in a career in the foreign service to help in the task, and to participate in the Department's efforts to give full recognition to the values of each of the two main Canadian linguistic communities. Some welcome these policies; others have been and perhaps still are reticent, but we must move beyond these doubts. We need the co-operation of all of you, particularly the new generation of officers. In order to find a climate and conditions which will enable you to serve your country in either of the official languages, you will have to be the dynamic force and the continuing inspiration of this policy. You will have to remember that relations between French- and English-speaking Canadians depend not only upon laws but upon the workings of the human spirit. It will be necessary for all of us to work in harmony and to engage in honest and constructive discussion in order to discover what is needed for the full and effective implementation of this policy. By taking part in that process, you will continue to affirm your own culture and language and you will render a service of great value to Canada.

I want you to be very sure that the Government means business. I hope your commitment to these goals will be no less firm.