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Meeting on Removal of Language Barriers  
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TRANSLATION & INTERPRETATION SERVICES  
(An aid for the integration of the Caribbean Nations)

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ECLA - CONFERENCE ON REMOVAL OF LANGUAGE BARRIERS IN THE CARIBBEAN  
AREA

Subject: Translation and Interpretership Services  
(an aid for the integration of the Caribbean Nations)

I.- THE PROBLEM

The Caribbean basin, considered as a geographical area brings us into direct contact with the lack of integration of the countries therein, both, under the cultural (languages, traditions, usages) point and view; and perhaps, that of a common ideological pragmatism that would allow us to face common problems in the area.

It is true that a great deal of the nations of the Caribbean are located islands (based on the geographical definition of "islands"), but it is also true, that the isolation concept implied in the definition of an island, applies also, to describe the isolation that these nations maintain among themselves, regardless that their geographical location be either continental or insular.

In other words; for our purposes; "The Caribbean is formed up by countries, which in some cases are geographical islands and in other cases cultural islands.

Ia - Origins of the Problem

Without getting into an exhaustive qualitative analysis of the problem's origin, I believe, these, can be summarized as resulting from two essential barriers:

- i) the cultural barrier (with its two sides
  - a) languages
  - b) tradition/usages
- ii) and the barrier that I have called ideological, in which the natural desire of people, having points of common interest, and framed within a territorial demarcation, in securing a political independence; affect unfavourably the regional integration of the nations they have formed.

### Ib Consequences of the Problem

It is not necessary an in-depth study of the question to realize that as a region, we suffer the consequences of:

- i) lack of an effective integration of our countries,
- ii) poor communication among our nations
- iii) poor identification of common problems

This is even more significant, when we think, that all of our countries, originate as such, within the same historical period; that we are located within an easily identifiable geographical frame, which implies common characteristics; that there are definite common cultural influences and that we suffer the same socio-economic problems.

Nevertheless, it is quite sad, to observe that through our historical evolution, the differences have weighed more than the points of coincidence.

### II.- GOALS

There is no point in defining a problem, attempting (even though, quite generally) to identify its origins and outlining its consequences; if no goals are set to cope with the problem and possible solutions to reach these goals are not defined.

It is my opinion, that in this case, goals shall be figured in terms of a cause-effect relationship of the origins and consequences of the problem.

I have, therefore, defined three basic goals within the context of Integration of the nations in the Caribbean area:

- i) To achieve a better understanding among the nations of the Caribbean
- ii) To establish mutual-assistance mechanisms among the countries in the region.
- iii) To facilitate transfer of solutions, found feasible, to common problems for the countries in the region.

Up to now, I have not discussed the topic defined as subject for this International Gathering: Removal of Language Barriers in the Caribbean Region, this has been, no oversight; it has been total and fully intentional; since it is my belief, that the existence of such barriers do not constitute the true problem of the Caribbean; but rather a factor arising from an ages-old lack of regional policy for cultural and ideological integration.

My personal experience, as an interpreter, operating in the Caribbean area, and also of others in my group, can be summed up very simply in saying that "generally we do not communicate among ourselves, not basically because we speak different languages, but rather because we have been taught to think different one from the other; because we do not think in terms of us in relation to our neighbors, but in terms of isolated countries, attempting to survive without caring for whatever happens to our neighbors, even more, in extreme cases, attempting to survive on expense of our neighbors.

### III.- SOLUTIONS

In order to scope the different possible solutions to the problem, we should survey and face a very large number of factors ranging from cultural, to social, economical and political; which would not fit into a paper of this nature; for such reason I shall concentrate in only two aspects: a) the long range solution, whose fundamental aspect it is a regional integrated educational policy; and b) the assistance, which on a short term basis can the increase of translation and interpretership services render.

### III a. Long range solution

The proposed long-range solution, is the development of an Integrated Regional Education Policy for all the countries in the region in order to attack the problems, right at their origins.

This integrated educational policy shall comprise, among others, the following objectives:

- 1) To develop common curricula for the three basic levels of education (primary, secondary and university) to be implemented in the Caribbean basin countries.
- 2) To strengthen language training in the main languages of the area in the primary and secondary school level.
- 3) To develop textbooks on the Cultural History of the area, and including this subject in the education curricula of the Caribbean countries.
- 4) To encourage students exchange programs among the countries in the area.
- 5) To encourage the exchange of activities related with spreading the knowledge of folklore of the Caribbean nations.

### III b. Short term solution

Long range solutions, if it is true that are designed to correct problems from their roots and its eventual eradication, involve the disadvantage of preventing us from satisfactorily coping with the problems and some of their consequences at the very moment in which we become aware of them. For this reason, every long range solution shall also imply searching for another solution which would be applicable immediately to insure an intermediate progress stage towards the end goals.

In our case, a definite aid towards effective integration of the Caribbean countries, would be an increased availability of translation and interpretation services. This forces us to define:

- i) Need for such services

Even though, the last few years have brought about a certain awareness of this need (perhaps as a result of increased

communications requirements and technology transfer) it seems to me, rather improbable (or at least we have not learned about it) that any survey or inquiry has been carried out in the area

attempting to determine, which are: the immediate future, mid-term and long range needs of these services.

Perhaps, the only formal recommendation I would dare to make in this paper would be that of conducting a survey (on a sampling basis, to reduce costs) in the Caribbean countries, covering:

- 1.- existing services
- 2.- volume of usage
- 3.- relative workload for each one of the three main language pairs in the region (Spanish-English, English-French and French-Spanish).
4. Projections of increased demand.

and using the results of this survey in planning and designing the educational policies of the countries.

#### ii. Type of training required

It seems convenient to my point of view, that in spite of the parallelism between translators and interpreters, a clarification be made of the differences between them as they have a direct incidence on the training requirements.

The interpreter is responsible of providing a clear and as precise as possible (not necessarily perfect) communication at the very moment and place where the exchange of ideas occurs (or is supposed to occur). And this communication in many instances involves subjects that are of no interest or beyond the comprehensive domain of the interpreter. The interpreter transmits ideas, conveys emotions; the translator transmits knowledge (in the most pure and technically possible manner). Without attempting to establish any relative degree of superiority of one above the other as to the results of their work (which I consider equally important), I must express my very personal opinion, that the interpreter shall possess, before anything else a natural ability to grasp ideas and reflecting emotions, an ability to develop a capacity for quickly understanding situations and this is, in my concept, a natural born ability which goes beyond the strict linguistic mastering of the languages involved.

The translator on the other hand, requires a carefulness and attention to details, which is very seldom found in interpreters.

In other words, I believe, that apart from language ability, the translator can be formed through academic means, whilst the interpreter is born with its natural ability (which can of course be improved to a larger or lesser degree through training) and shall, of course, undergo the necessary language education.

Having clarified this point, I don't think it is necessary to list training requirements, type of facilities required (laboratories, etc.) since there are already existing schools or universities in some of the countries in the area which have had these careers included in their instruction plans and which we can easily approach to secure all pertinent data and additionally benefiting from their experience in the "human" side of the subject.

These data and experiences could be analyzed and adapted to specific conditions prevailing on the different countries, to produce, then a model of educational institution in this particular field.

iii) Career possibilities/General Motivation to study languages.

We must admit that at the moment of deciding what career to undertake (and this is valid only for those privileged ones in our countries, that can or have been able to carry out studies to the career level) a factor incides, that in many instances affects the vocational considerations, being this: profitability and relative length of the career studies.

Until very recently, multilingual capabilities in our countries, were practically limited (with rare exceptions) to persons, of a relatively high economic bracket whose parents, facing the deficiencies of the national educational system, or because of prestige reasons, sent their children to foreign countries to schools, where the language knowledge was acquired, but not necessarily on a professional linguistic approach. As a consequence of this, many of the persons working in language-related work in our countries are not truly professionals in their field.

Foreign influence and the needs attached to the transfer of technology, has granted these persons work opportunities, which have, in turn, fostered the use of language knowledge as a career, thus changing the general perspective; and originating a shift of through trends towards language based careers rather than the exclusive utilization of languages as a tool.

Nevertheless, if we think in terms of searching motivations to encourage language studying, both possibilities must be taken into consideration.

#### 1) Languages as a Tool

Being countries subject to the influences and pressures of the center of technological and economical development, we find ourselves, forced to absorb, as quickly as possible, the knowledge generated at these centers of influence.

Our new generation of professionals and technologists is developing an awareness of this knowledge absorption need, and starts gradually accepting the value of languages as a tool to improve their professional capabilities.

There is a need to emphasize on this approach to language training as a working tool in technological improvement in order to provide a better motivation towards learning a foreign language, above the obstacles of political ideologies, time limitation, deficient educational systems and so forth.

It is sad to admit that due to the facts pertaining to underdevelopment of the region, there exists an unpleasant reality, which is that one of the main motivations to learn a second language, is facilitating the eventual adaptation of an individual within a society of a language different than his own, in a more developed country. In other words many of our people learning a foreign language do so hoping to emigrate to a more developed country which may offer the opportunities that his own country and society denied him.

This is very difficult to correct, until our countries become capable of offering better living conditions to their nationals. Anyhow, it shall be taken into consideration, (within the general frame of an educational policy



to encourage foreign language training) that, this language knowledge might revert into an uncontrolled, exaggerated migration of the Caribbean countries inhabitants towards the more developed countries of the hemisphere, with the damaging subsequent effect of brain and qualified labor escape.

## 2) Languages as a career

On the other hand and within the other area of influence, a trend to accept languages as a career, economically profitable, starts developing. Incidence is larger in female population, which finds in language and bilingual secretarial careers a relatively high employment rate in fairly short career length.

The languages degrees, bestowed by many of our universities offers also a career opportunity, but oriented mainly to a population of a higher economic bracket which views the career as an academic certification of a certain cultural degree.

Basically, the up-building of a profitable labor market is the key to institutionalization of language studying as a career (teachers, translators, interpreters, etc.) just as it has happened with bilingual secretaries (which at least in my country, is one of the intermediate level careers attracting a larger number of students). But this only occurs as a product of interaction of development factors.

We believe, that language studying offers ample career opportunities in the Caribbean area, and besides can supply us with a valuable tool to reach effective integration and communication among our countries for which it becomes profitable to promote its motivation.

We insist, nevertheless, that the fundamental barrier between the Caribbean countries is not the language diversity problem, but the absence of a true integrationist policy scoping not only the economic aspect but rather concentrating effort in the socio-cultural side.