

## SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION AT CONGRESSES

Under this title the Council for International Organization of Medical Sciences has put out an issue of the *CIOMS Newsletter* (No. 5, January 1960) which should be in the hands of everyone concerned with organizing an international congress who is not already fully informed in the matter.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking of the interpreters it is said, among other things, that they must be expert in their work, and "well-fed [and] contented," if the results are to be satisfactory. Furthermore, they must be acquainted with the specialized terminology to be used in the meeting, and must receive all relevant documentation at least one month before its beginning. It seems unlikely that, for one of our congresses, a group of interpreters familiar with the terminology of leprosy could be found, and we can but wonder how even the second condition could be met. Always in the past some members—perhaps because of last-hour appointment by their sponsors—have not submitted their papers early but have brought them with them.

In that connection there is a point not touched on which, from the experience of previous leprosy congresses, has been found of much practical importance. That is the ahead-of-time provision by the authors of short versions of their papers. In a recent article Audy<sup>2</sup> pointed out that a paper in print and the same one delivered at a meeting are two very different communications; they cannot possibly be identical and equally effective. It is therefore necessary to prepare two versions, one for publication and one for reading.

At the Havana (1948) and Madrid (1953) leprosy congresses the interpreters were not regularly (if at all) provided with copies of what the speakers were to read. Consequently, they were required to translate by ear what they heard the speakers say, or thought they did, almost wholly unprepared for the technical language. The speakers had only their full papers to use, which often were long, and because they were limited to 10 minutes on the platform they sometimes tried to present the whole thing by rapid reading. That left the interpreters completely stalled, unable to give forth with much more than disconnected sentences or thoughts, often garbled. The result was, in total, highly unsatisfactory.

At Tokyo (1958) the situation was much improved, thanks to an expert of the WHO staff, Mr. J. P. Schellenberg, who came from Manila several days ahead to assist the Congress. He immediately put the secretariat of the International Leprosy Association to work making 10-minute condensations of as many of the papers on hand as they could,

<sup>1</sup>The *CIOMS Newsletter* is distributed free of charge by CIOMS, 6 Rue Franklin, Paris 16.

<sup>2</sup>Audy, J. R. Delivery of papers at congresses and other meetings. *Med. J. Malaya* **14** (1959) 1-11.

and then getting made enough copies of each condensation to supply the interpreters as well as the author. The result of that extraordinary, last-minute effort, so far as it could be carried out under the circumstances, was a marked improvement in audience satisfaction. There was, however, one unexpected and unfortunate, effect in that in several instances it was only the condensation instead of the author's full paper which was available to the congress secretariat for publication in the transactions.

It seems clear that there should be a rule—and it is understood that some organizations now have one—that each author be required to supply, before the meeting, both his full paper intended for publication and a condensation which can be read deliberately in 10 minutes. The Congress organizers will then be able to have made the necessary copies of the shorter versions to supply the number of interpreters to be employed.

As for how many interpreters are needed for a given situation, the *Newsletter* referred to gives a tabulation which leaves one a little uncertain. More specific information has been supplied by Mr. Schellenberg, essentially as follows:

There should be, basically, two interpreters per working language if only one hall is used, and if no committees require interpreters at the same time. If three languages are used, six interpreters should suffice. The regular compensation rate, required by the International Interpreters' Association, is \$30 per day, plus of course travel expenses, and a \$15 per diem for the time they are away from home. If, however, they should be paid \$48 a day each, they would be willing to put in additional effort and practically work alone, one per booth, using an extra one as a rotational unit between the booths. Thus for a three-language meeting, 4 interpreters would suffice, and there would be a saving on travel expense if the meeting is held at a distance from their European headquarters. The number needed for a two-language meeting would be correspondingly smaller.

The expense involved in this feature of a meeting is truly considerable, not considering the cost of rental of the equipment. It is readily seen why some international meetings have used only two languages, even though *amor proprio* with respect to the national language of the hosts has had to be sacrificed.—H. W. W.