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Agenda Item 3: Follow-up of the activities of the E/CAR/CATG
3.2 Progress report of the AIM Committee

AIM PERSONNEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY: LEVELS AND DOCUMENTATION CREATION

(Presented by the AIM Committee Rapporteur)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
This paper seeks to outline the basic requirements for English Language Proficiency and its use in the aviation sector.	
<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safety• Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency• Security & Facilitation• Economic Development of Air Transport• Environmental Protection
<i>References:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annex 1• Doc 9835• Doc 9432• Doc 9683-AN/950

1. Introduction

1.1 Aviation has traditionally used English as its primary language. Each country was responsible for establishing its own aviation English standard for many years. These norms differed from country to country, often resulting in misunderstandings and contributing to many incidents and accidents. To improve the safety of aviation globally, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) developed an international standard for language proficiency requirements.

1.2 ICAO requires that all pilots, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators involved in international operations must be able to speak and understand English to a level 4 proficiency of ICAO's language proficiency rating scale. Effective communication, which includes all transfer of information, is essential for the safe operation of flight. The message might be transferred by speech, by the written word, by a variety of symbols and displays (e.g. instruments, CRT, maps) or by non-verbal

means such as gestures and body language. The quality and effectiveness of communication is determined by its intelligibility: the degree to which the intended message is understood by the receiver.

2. Background

2.1 Over 800 people lost their lives in three major accidents (one collision on the ground, one accident involving fuel exhaustion and one controlled flight into terrain). In each of these seemingly different types of accidents, accident investigators found a common contributing element: insufficient English language proficiency on the part of the flight crew or a controller had played a contributing role in the chain of events leading to the accident. In addition to these high-profile accidents, multiple incidents and near misses are reported annually as a result of language problems, instigating a review of communication procedures and standards worldwide. Such concern was heightened after a 1996 mid-air collision in which 349 passengers and crew members were killed in an accident in which insufficient English language proficiency played a contributing role.

2.1.2 Concern over the role of language in accidents led to the adoption of ICAO Assembly Resolution A32-16, in which the ICAO Council was urged to direct the Air Navigation Commission to consider this matter with a high degree of priority and complete the task of strengthening relevant ICAO provisions concerning language requirements, with a view to obligating Contracting States to take steps to ensure that air traffic control personnel and flight crews involved in flight operations in airspace where the use of the English language is required are proficient in conducting and comprehending radiotelephony communications in the English language. In 2000, the Proficiency Requirements in Common English Study Group (PRICESG) convened for the first time. PRICESG was established by the Air Navigation Commission to assist ICAO in advancing the language competency task, which included, among other elements, the following aspects:

- a) carry out a comprehensive review of existing provisions concerning all aspects of air-ground and ground-ground voice communications in international civil aviation, aimed at the identification of deficiencies and/or shortcomings;
- b) develop ICAO provisions concerning standardized English language testing requirements and procedures; and
- c) develop minimum skill level requirements in the common usage of the English language.

3. ICAO Language Requirements Holistic Descriptors

3.1 The ICAO language proficiency requirements include the following “Holistic Descriptors”.

Proficient speakers shall:

- a. communicate effectively in voice-only (telephone/radiotelephone) and in face-to-face situations;
- b. communicate on common, concrete and work-related topics with accuracy and clarity;

- c. use appropriate communicative strategies to exchange messages and to recognize and resolve - misunderstandings (e.g. to check, confirm, or clarify information) in a general or work-related context;
- d. handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine work situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar; and
- e. uses a dialect or accent which is intelligible to the aeronautical community.

4. ICAO's Language Proficiency Levels

4.1 ICAO's language proficiency rating scale for aviation English:

Level 1 – Pre-Elementary
 Level 2 – Elementary
 Level 3 – Pre-Operational
 Level 4 – Operational
 Level 5 – Extended
 Level 6 – Expert

4.2 Level 4- Operational Proficiency Level

4.2.1 All pilots, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators involved in international operations must be able to speak and understand English to a level 4.

4.2.2 The following criteria for level 4 –Operational Proficiency apply:

Vocabulary

Vocabulary range and accuracy are usually sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete, and work related topics. Can often paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary in unusual or unexpected circumstances.

Structure

Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are used creatively and are usually well controlled. Errors may occur, particularly in unusual or unexpected circumstances, but rarely interfere with meaning.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation but only sometimes interfere with ease of understanding.

Fluency

Produces stretches of language at an appropriate tempo. There may be occasional loss of fluency on transition from rehearsed or formulaic speech to spontaneous interaction, but this does not prevent

effective communication. Can make limited use of discourse markers or connectors. Fillers are not distracting.

Comprehension

Comprehension is mostly accurate on common, concrete, and work related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. When the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events, comprehension may be slower or require clarification strategies.

Interaction

Responses are usually immediate, appropriate, and informative. Initiates and maintains exchanges even when dealing with an unexpected turn of events. Deals adequately with apparent misunderstandings by checking, confirming, or clarifying.

Communication is universally acknowledged to be critical to aviation safety. Industry understanding of communication and language as fundamental aspects of aviation safety are therefore critical aspects for all aviation personnel to understand. This includes AIM officers who are a part of aeronautical operations.

4.3 Currently, there is no English Language Proficiency level requirements for AIM personnel globally. Within the NACC region there are many different accents (speech) and translations (written communication) which can lead to higher risks of erroneous information or misinterpretation of published information.

4.4 There are no official license requirements for AIM personnel and therefore there is no obligation for them to obtain a particular level of English Language proficiency even though they are expected to provide briefings for aeronautical personnel, publish NOTAM, AIP, AICs and supplements which are considered safety critical information. There is no specified level required to ensure the standardization of information and assure safety of communication. If AIM personnel communicate, prepare and disseminate safety critical information, shouldn't there be a minimum operational level?

4.5 For AIM training provided by IATA, as a prerequisite, it is recommended that the minimum level of proficiency is the ICAO operational level 4 in English.

5. Current Practices

5.1 ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements

5.2 See attachment

ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements

To help you in your English language assessment and training, IATA offers the following courses:

[Aviation English Language Solution – Assessment](#)

Developed in partnership with Berlitz Languages, Inc., this comprehensive assessment service lets you easily determine your ICAO Aviation English proficiency level and select the right training program to bring you up to level 4 proficiency

[Aviation English Language Solution - Training](#)

Developed in partnership with Berlitz Languages, Inc., this complete language training solution provides interactive instruction to ensure your ICAO-set Aviation English requirements and that you can communicate effectively on the job.

[Contact Us](#) for information on how to organize this training for your company

Pre-operational Level 3

Pronunciation		Structure		Vocabulary		Fluency	
Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation and frequently interfere with ease of understanding.	Accent at this Pre-operational Level 3 is so strong as to render comprehension by an international community of aeronautical radiotelephony users very difficult or impossible. It should be noted that native or second language speakers may be assessed at this level in cases where a regional variety of the language has not been sufficiently attenuated.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns associated with predictable situations are not always well controlled. Errors frequently interfere with meaning.	A weak command of basic grammatical structures at this level will limit available range of expression or result in errors which could lead to misunderstandings.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are often sufficient to communicate on common, concrete or work-related topics, but range is limited and the word choice often inappropriate. Is often unable to paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary.	Gaps in vocabulary knowledge and/or choice of wrong or non-existent words are apparent at this level. This has a negative impact on fluency or results in errors which could lead to misunderstandings. The frequent inability to paraphrase unknown words or in the process of clarification makes accurate communication impossible.	Produces stretches of language, but phrasing and pausing are often inappropriate. Hesitations or slowness in language processing may prevent effective communication. Fillers are sometimes distracting.	The slowness of speech flow at this level is such that communication lacks concision and efficiency. Long silent pauses frequently interrupt the speech flow. Speakers at this level will fail to obtain the professional confidence of their interlocutors.

ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements

Operational Level 4

Pronunciation		Structure		Vocabulary		Fluency	
Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation, but only sometimes interfere with ease of understanding.	Operational Level 4 speakers demonstrate a marked accent, or localized regional variety of English. Occasionally, a proficient listener may have to pay close attention to understand or may have to clarify something from time to time. Operational Level 4 is certainly not a perfect level of proficiency; it is the minimum level of proficiency determined to be safe for air traffic control communications. While it is not an Expert level, it is important to keep in mind that pronunciation plays the critical role in aiding comprehension between two non-native speakers of English.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are used creatively and are usually well controlled. Errors may occur, particularly in unusual or unexpected circumstances, but rarely interfere with meaning.	Operational Level 4 speakers have good command of basic grammatical structures. They do not merely have a memorized set of words or phrases on which they rely but have sufficient command of basic grammar to create new meaning as appropriate. They demonstrate local errors and infrequent global errors and communication is effective overall. Level 4 speakers will not usually attempt complex structures, and when they do, quite a lot of errors would be expected resulting in less effective communication.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are usually sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete and work related topics. Can often paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary in unusual or unexpected circumstances.	An Operational Level 4 speaker will likely not have a well-developed sensitivity to register (see glossary on page (ix)). A speaker at this level will usually be able to manage communication on work-related topics, but may sometimes need clarification. When faced with a communication breakdown, an Operational Level 4 speaker can paraphrase and negotiate meaning so that the message is understood. The ability to paraphrase includes appropriate choices of simple vocabulary and considerate use of speech rate and pronunciation.	Produces stretches of language at an appropriate tempo. There may be occasional loss of fluency on transition from rehearsed or formulaic speech to spontaneous interaction, but this does not prevent effective communication. Can make limited use of discourse markers or connectors. Fillers are not distracting.	Speech rate at this level may be slowed by the requirements of language processing, but remains fairly constant and does not negatively affect the speaker's involvement in communication. The speaker has the possibility of speaking a little faster than the ICAO recommended rate of 100 words per minute if the situation requires (Annex 10, Volume II, 5.2.1.5.3 b).

ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements

Extended Level 5

Pronunciation		Structure		Vocabulary		Fluency	
Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation, though influenced by the first language or regional variation, rarely interfere with ease of understanding.	Extended Level 5 speakers demonstrate a marked accent, or localized regional variety of English, but one which rarely interferes with how easily understood their speech is. They are always clear and understandable, although, only occasionally, a proficient listener may have to pay close attention.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled. Complex structures are attempted but with errors which sometimes interferes with meaning.	Extended Level 5 speakers demonstrate greater control of complex grammatical structures than do Operational Level 4 speakers and may commit global errors from time to time when using complex structures. The critical difference between the Level 4 and Level 5 requirements concerns the use of basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns compared to the use of complex structures (see the glossary of basic and complex structures in Appendix B, Part IV). At Level 5, the structure descriptors refer to consistent control of basic structure, with errors possibly occurring when complex structures and language are used. There is actually a big jump between Level 4 and Level 5. Level 5 speakers will have a more sophisticated use of English overall, but will exhibit some errors in their use of complex language structures, but not in their basic structure patterns.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete and work-related topics. Paraphrases consistently and successfully. Vocabulary is sometimes idiomatic.	Extended Level 5 speakers may display some sensitivity to register, with a lexical range which may not be sufficient to communicate effectively in as broad a range of topics as an Expert Level 6 speaker, but a speaker with Extended proficiency will have no trouble paraphrasing whenever necessary.	Able to speak at length with relative ease on familiar topics but may not vary speech flow as a stylistic device. Can make use of appropriate discourse markers or connectors.	Rate of speech and organization of discourse at this level approach natural fluency. Under appropriate circumstances, rates significantly higher than the ICAO recommended rate of 100 words per minute can be achieved without negatively affecting intelligibility.

ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements

Expert 6

Pronunciation		Structure		Vocabulary		Fluency	
<p>Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation, though possibly influenced by the first language or regional variation, almost never interfere with ease of understanding.</p>	<p>An Expert Level 6 speaker may be a speaker of English as a first language with a widely understood dialect or may be a very proficient second-language speaker, again with a widely used or understood accent and/or dialect. The speakers' accent or dialect may or may not identify them as second language users, but the pronunciation patterns or any difficulties or "mistakes" almost never interfere with the ease with which they are understood. Expert speakers are always clear and understandable.</p>	<p>Both basic and complex grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled.</p>	<p>Expert Level 6 speakers do not demonstrate consistent global structural or grammatical errors but may exhibit some local errors.</p>	<p>Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on a wide variety of familiar and unfamiliar topics. Vocabulary is idiomatic, nuanced and sensitive to register.</p>	<p>Level 6 speakers demonstrate a strong sensitivity to register. Another marker of strong proficiency seems to be the acquisition of, and facility with, idiomatic expressions and the ability to communicate nuanced ideas. As such, use of idioms may be taken into account in assessment procedures designed to identify Level 6 users in a non-radiotelephony context. This is not however intended to imply that idiomatic usages are a desirable feature of aeronautical radiotelephony communications. On the contrary, use of idioms is an obstacle to intelligibility and mutual understanding between non-expert users and should therefore be avoided by all users in this environment.</p>	<p>Able to speak at length with a natural, effortless flow. Varies speech flow for stylistic effect, e.g. to emphasize a point. Uses appropriate discourse markers and connectors spontaneously.</p>	<p>Fluency at this level is nativelike or near native-like. It is notably characterized by a high degree of flexibility in producing language and in adapting the speech rate to the context of communication and the purposes of the speaker.</p>