ICAO Language Proficiency: 2012 Progress Report Workshop

Aviation Professionals. HR Management and Training.

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Abstract
ICAO Language Proficiency–Training for success

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Anglo-Continental's Experience and Observations of the industry as it prepares its Pilots and ATCOs to meet ICAO's Operational Level 4 Language Proficiency.

As we are all aware, by 5 March 2008, air traffic controllers and pilots were required by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) to have a certificate attesting to their proficiency in the language(s) used for aeronautical communication. ICAO Document 9835 - "Manual on the Implementation of ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements" - lays out the principles according to which the language proficiency requirements should be met. This deadline was subsequently extended to 5 March 2011 when it became clear that the majority of member states would not be compliant by that deadline.

We have now entered 2012 and I wish to discuss Anglo-Continental's perceptions and experience of where we are with regards to assessing aviation professionals and in particular, the training of not only these professionals but the personnel needed to deliver such training. By sharing Anglo-Continental's experience it is hoped that you will see what other professionals in the aviation industry are doing to help stake-holders meet the new ICAO Language Proficiency requirements.

For those of you who may not be familiar with Anglo-Continental, we are an English language teaching organisation that has taught English for 60 years. Our main training centre is located in Bournemouth, England.   We deliver a wide variety of professional English courses. Anglo-Continental's Aviation English Division has been providing aviation English language training programmes - particularly for Pilots and Air Traffic Controllers - since 1971. Since the introduction of the ICAO language proficiency requirements, we have also developed a range of courses specifically designed to assist aviation organisations and individuals in achieving the mandatory ICAO Level 4 (Operational) and have been privileged to provide intensive English language training programmes for many aviation specialists from all over the world, including the

Anglo-Continental

Russian Federation and the CIS. We are corporate members of the Flight Safety Foundation International, and cooperate closely with them in the organisation of language training programmes.   In addition to providing 12 English for Aviation courses;

- Aeronautical Engineering
- Air Navigation
- Airline Operations
- Air Traffic Control
- Aviation Familiarisation
- Aviation Fire and Emergency Services

- Aviation Meteorology
- Cabin Crew
- Airline Marketing
- Pilot Training
- R/T Phraseology
- Aviation Security

we have, in response to the new ICAO Language Proficiency requirements, developed three courses specifically designed to improve Pilots' and ATCOs' English language level in order that they reach the mandatory ICAO Level 4.

- **Introduction to Aviation English Programme (IAE)**
  For candidates with limited knowledge of aviation who are intending to start training for a career in the aviation industry.
- **ICAO 291 Foundation Module**
  For candidates intending to take an Aviation English Test in the future and who require an overall improvement in their general and specialised English language skills.
- **ICAO 291 Level 4 Module**
  A more Aviation Specific Intensive Course intended to develop the candidates communicative skills with focus on meeting the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements for level 4 and above.

These programmes provide intensive tuition and practice in spoken English, with growing emphasis on professional aviation English as trainees' knowledge and skills improve.

When delivering these courses to aviation professionals we received more and more enquiries from sponsors and educational groups about training courses for Aviation Teaching Methodology and Rater training courses. These enquiries should not have surprised us since many of our

customers have ongoing language instruction programmes for their staff in country, and Anglo-Continental is also a well known Teacher Training centre preparing people for the University of Cambridge's CELTA qualification, and a test centre for the University of Cambridge ESOL's Teaching Knowledge Test. Based on this solid experience we designed two courses aimed specifically at aviation English teaching professionals looking to develop and update their skills and one for the same professionals wanting to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to assess their own ATCO's and pilots.

The first is a:

Refresher Course in English Language and Teaching Methodology for Teachers of Aviation English.

This is a 30 lesson per week programme consisting of:

- **General teaching methodology**
  Implementing a lexical approach to lesson planning
  Task design
  Phonology
  Listening skills – gist, specific information, inference
  Teaching strategies for checking understanding
  Teaching other conversation strategies
  Checking meaning – time, tense and lexis

- **Aviation English**
  Aircraft structures and systems
  Aviation and airport organisation
  Flight operations and flight safety
  ATC organisation and control of airspace
  En-route, aerodrome and approach control
  ICAO R/T phraseology and procedures
  Standard and non-standard phraseology
  Incidents and accidents

- **Teaching methodology specifically within an aviation context**
  Teaching to the ICAO descriptors
  Assessing a trainee's level regarding the ICAO descriptors
  Plain English for pilots and ATCOs
  Sourcing, creating and exploiting appropriate teaching materials
  Using aviation video/DVD materials for comprehension and language skills development
  Making lessons relevant to trainees' needs
  Testing progress and achievement
  Teaching functional language appropriate to ICAO doc 9835

Expected outcomes of the course include:

- Teachers gaining greater confidence in teaching this highly specialised area of English language teaching to aviation professionals in accordance with ICAO's guidelines.

- Raising the teachers' awareness of how to best exploit and use published aviation materials as well as sourcing other resources and adapting them for use in the classroom.

- Raising the teachers' awareness and knowledge of the subject area.

This course has been successfully delivered to both native and non-native English language teachers and we have had a very positive feedback about the course content as well as the skill, experience and professionalism of our Aviation Teacher Trainers.

The second course is a:

Professional Training Course for Raters / Assessors

This includes **30 lessons per week** in a closed professional group, supplemented by directed private study and project work.

The course is divided into two parts:

Week 1

- **Rating awareness and practice**

- Identifying the criteria for ICAO levels in listening (general comprehension, interpretation and discrimination) and speaking (accuracy, intelligibility and communicative competence)
- Defining and evaluating appropriate levels of competence in communication skills, and the 6 criteria of the ICAO Rating Scale
- Practical exercises in rating trainees' performance at various levels of the ICAO Rating Scale, with emphasis on levels 2 to 5
- Identifying areas for development in failed candidate performances, and guiding them towards improving their language proficiency
- Evaluating and comparing different test types

Week 2

Test Production and Delivery

- Sourcing and selecting materials, creating appropriate tasks for tests, familiarisation with appropriate hardware and software

- Production of materials to test their candidates' knowledge of communication skills in plain English and aviation phraseology in standard and non-standard situations

- Evaluating and trialling (in simulation) of test materials

- Creating keys and marking guides for assessors

- Marking and weighting

- Language testing ethics

- Planning, staffing and conducting high-stakes testing services for aviation specialists

Expected outcomes of the course include:

- Trainees will be able to accurately interpret the language criteria of the ICAO Rating Scale and apply them to a variety of tests and sound files of aviation professionals.

- Trainees will complete and consistently meet the required level during the inter-rating standardisation sessions.

- Trainees will demonstrate the ability to source and adapt appropriate materials for use in an assessment test as well as demonstrate the ability to deliver these test items in a professional and appropriate way.

Demand

A review of the demand for these courses, while not a scientific analysis, gives an indication of the steps that have been taken by the industry so far with respect to achieving Operational level 4.

Sponsors who enrol their trainees on the Modules of our ICAO Course 291 are not relying on us to provide full and total language training up to Level 4. Rather the majority of the organisations who enrol their trainees on these courses typically have an on-going English language training programme in their home country. This is because, even though sponsors recognise that total language immersion courses achieve the best results in a fraction of the time of learning English in a non-English speaking environment, most of them simply cannot afford taking active ATCOs and Pilots off-line for time required for the training.

Aviation organisations therefore provide their trainees with an on-going English language training programme in country, and at certain intervals will sponsor their employees to come to England

for 4, 6 or 8 week English language immersion programme. This combination strategy is often the best approach to balancing training time with work commitments.

While it is difficult to predict how long an individual trainee may need to reach a specified level, as a guide, an able, well-motivated trainee with a European mother-tongue may be expected to require some 12 to 16 weeks of intensive full-time training in England to move from one ICAO Language Level to the next – and perhaps 16 to 20 weeks for transition from Level 3 to Level 4. Remember that not all Pilots and ATCO's will be natural linguists. Not all will achieve the same level of success in a given period of time. Key factors in professional trainees' progress through the levels include:

- Mother Tongue
- Motivation
- Linguistic Aptitude
- Exposure / Opportunities for practice
- Linguistic Environment
- Skill of instructors
- Living / Accommodation Conditions
- The facilities of the training centre

The first step, however, before any training can even be considered, is for sponsors to determine the current level of English of each trainee. Only when a the language level of a sponsor personnel has been determined can a detailed training programme be developed in conjunction with ourselves to meet the budgetary and operational needs of the sponsor along with, of course, the training requirements of the trainees. Anglo-Continental is currently receiving many requests to assess trainees so that their sponsors can evaluate their current standard of English and therefore determine the type, duration and cost of training necessary in order for them to achieve ICAO Level 4.

If your ATCOs and pilots are all at level 4 and above then you need not concern yourselves, that is, until their language skills need assessing again in 3 or 5 years time. However, if your ATCOs and pilots are not all at level 4 then you should be teaching them English. If you do not know their current ICAO language level you need them to be assessed immediately.

To conclude, our experience in combination with our expertise has led us to draw some conclusions:

- The need for initial assessment for diagnostic purposes in order to plan realistic and attainable training goals.

- The need for more qualified and experienced trainers to meet the demand.

- The need to train these English Aviation Teachers to fully understand what is required by candidates to successfully meet the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements.

- Achieving operational level does not mean an end to training, a continuous programme of language training is essential to prevent language attrition and ensure future success in language assessments and air safety.

- Encouraging future aviation professionals to embark on English language training at the earliest opportunity.