

INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION
FIRST MEETING OF DIRECTORS OF CIVIL AVIATION OF THE
CARIBBEAN REGION (CAR/DCA/1)

(Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands, 8-11 October 2002)

Agenda Item 4: Air Navigation

4.1 ATM Developments

ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN ATC

(Presented by the United States of America)

SUMMARY

This paper presents the results of the work of the ICAO Proficiency Requirements in Common English Study Group (PRICE SG) up to now. It also provides background information on how the US contributed to the definition of the newly proposed standard.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The PRICE SG was convened in November of 2000. PRICE is comprised of representatives from all geographical regions and the major organizations such as IFATCA, IFALPA, and IATA. The PRICE SG met three times in 2000 and 2001.

PRICE Study Group

1.2 Based on recommendations from PRICE SG, the Secretariat submitted proposals to amend Annexes 1, 6, 10, and 11 to the Air Navigation Commission in November of last year. The proposals are outlined in a State Letter, which was recently sent.

2. DISCUSSION

Annex 10 Change Proposal

2.1 Currently, Annex 10 states that the air ground radiotelephony communications shall be conducted in the language normally used by the station on the ground or in the English language.

2.2 The Annex 10 change proposal will state that the English language shall be available on request from any aircraft, at all stations on the ground serving designated airports and routes served by international air services.

Annex 1 Change Proposal

2.3 As of 1 January 2008, the language proficiency of flight crews, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators required to communicate in a language other than a mother tongue or native language, shall be formally evaluated at intervals in accordance with an individuals demonstrated proficiency level (in accordance with the rating scale).

Annex 6 Change Proposal

2.4 Operators shall ensure that flight crew members demonstrate the ability to speak and understand the language used for aeronautical radiotelephony communications as specified in Annex 1.

Annex 11 Change Proposals

2.5 An air traffic services provider shall ensure that air traffic controllers speak and understand the language used for radiotelephony communications as specified in Annex 1.

2.6 Except when communications between air traffic control units are conducted in a mutually agreed language the English language shall be used for such communications.

FAA Process Development

2.7 The Federal Aviation Administration, with the assistance of the Defense Language Institute English Language Center (DLIELC), conducted a research study called the Air Traffic Control English Language Project (ATCELP) to help in determining what constitutes an adequate level of English proficiency and how it should be measured.

Standard Determination

2.8 The ATCELP results are based on the use of the Inter-agency Language Roundtable (ILR) rating scale. It is a standard reference scale used by the United States Government to rate proficiency not only in English, but in other languages as well.

2.9 Standardized language assessments using the ILR scale have been in service for many years. The scale consists of increments of proficiency ranging from “0” (no language capability, or isolated words) to “5” (equivalent to a well-educated native speaker). There are additional levels between these increments (0+, 1+, 2+...etc.). All together, this forms the eleven-point ILR scale.

2.10 The ATCELP used several steps or phases to develop a recommended minimum level of English language proficiency for ATC.

Phase One

2.11 Establish if language requirements of the air traffic controller job are consistent across geographical regions. Latin American and U.S. air traffic controllers rated tasks on the list in terms of importance and frequency. The results showed that language requirements of the air traffic controller job are consistent between the two cultures.

Phase Two

2.12 Three teams of U.S. ATC professionals (air traffic controllers and pilots) were trained on the different ILR skill levels. The three teams then used the ILR scale to rate the language proficiency level required to perform the list of common tasks derived from the first phase.

2.13 The three teams also evaluated audio tapes of Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPIs) and real ATC job samples collected by DLIELC experts in Latin America. The OPIs were 10-40 minute, face-to-face interviews of air traffic controllers conducted by DLIELC experts.

Phase Three

2.14 Professional English language evaluators assessed samples of radio transmission tapes made by Latin American controllers in routine and non-routine transmissions to assess level necessary to resolve these situations.

Phase Four

2.15 ATCELP results were compared to the Test in Proficiency in English for Air Traffic Control (PELA) used by The European Organization For The Safety Of Air Navigation (EUROCONTROL) to verify and validate ATCELP’s initial estimates of a minimally acceptable level of air traffic controller English language proficiency.

2.16 The comparison showed that all major ATC communication job task categories from ATCELP are represented on the PELA and that passing scores on parts of the PELA are consistent with initial language proficiency estimates of ATCELP.

Results of the Research

2.17 The ATCELP analyzed the results from all of the methodologies and derived a minimum English language proficiency level of “2” on the IRL scale for speaking and listening proficiency.

Results: Level 2, Speaking

2.18 This rating indicates that the individual is able to fully participate in casual conversations, can express facts, give instructions, describe, report on, and provide narration about current, past, and future activities, and can handle situations with complications.

2.19 At this level, the speaker is able to present concrete topics (e.g., background, current events) and is understandable to a native speaker who is not accustomed to interacting with foreigners, although miscommunication may occur at times.

Results: Level 2, Listening

2.20 Similarly, a level of “2” for listening proficiency indicates that the individual can understand conversations about everyday topics (e.g., personal information, current events), understands facts, even though he/she may not be able to make culturally based inferences

PRICE Sub Group Participation

2.21 This level of “2” for speaking and listening and the supporting research formed the basis of the FAA’s contribution to the results of the PRICE. The recommendation level from PRICE is very similar to the IRL level 2.

Application in the U.S.

2.22 The FAA Flight Standards is working on creating regulations that will require non native speaker applicants for pilots licenses to meet the IRL scale level of 2

3. RECOMMENDATION

3.1 The meeting is invited to note the information contained in this paper and to;

3.2 Actively support the endorsement of the ICAO proposal at all levels.