Sixth North American, Central American and Caribbean Working Group (NACC/WG) Aeronautical Information Management Implementation Task Force Meeting (AIM/TF/6)
Mexico City, Mexico, and on-line, 21 – 24 August 2023

Agenda Item 6:   AIM PERSONNEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY: LEVELS AND DOCUMENTATION CREATION

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY SUGGESTION FOR AIM PERSONNEL

(AIM/TF Rapporteur)

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">This Working Paper suggests the correct development of proper English Language Proficiency Level Requirements for the Aeronautical Information Management Personnel (AIS and ARO), to improve safety and efficiency within the operational communication language used by the profession.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Action:</td><td>Suggested actions are presented in Section 3.</td></tr>
<tr><td><i>Strategic Objectives:</i></td><td>• Strategic Objective 1 – Safety</td></tr>
<tr><td><i>References:</i></td><td>• Doc 9835
• International Civil Aviation English Association (ICAEA)
• IATA.org
• ICAO NACC AIM/TF/5 meeting
• Assembly 38th Session – WP 37
• ICAO journal – issue 5, 2013
• Aviation eLearning: Aviation English Levels Explained - Nov 7, 2022</td></tr>
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1.   Introduction

1.1   During the North American, Central American and Caribbean Working Group Aeronautical Information Management Task Force (AIM TF) Fifth Face-to-Face Meeting (AIM/TF/5), it was suggested and requested by participating States, that improving the English Language among AIM Personnel is highly needed, since noticeable language limitations and barriers can be seen in AIM publications, including NOTAMs.

1.2   ICAO set its first deadline — March 2008 — for ICAO Member States, planning for ELP standards to take effect at Level 4, Level 5 or Level 6 for all pilots flying international routes and all air traffic controllers serving international airports and routes.
For 70 years, ICAO has analyzed risks involving linguistic issues, raised awareness of systemic risks and pursued mitigations. In 2011–2021, ICAO and other stakeholders began to refine first-generation ELP standards and recommended practices.

1.3   As indicated by Doc 9835, the applicant for a language proficiency approval shall demonstrate at least an operational level of language proficiency both in the use of phraseologies and plain language. At the operational level, the applicant shall demonstrate the ability to:

➢ Communicate effectively in voice-only and in face-to-face situations.
➢ Communicate on common and work-related topics with accuracy and clarity.
➢ Use appropriate communicative strategies to exchange messages and to recognize and resolve misunderstandings in a general or work-related context;
➢ Handle successfully the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events which occurs within the context of a routine work situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar; and,
➢ Use a dialect or accent which is intelligible to the aeronautical community.

1.4   ICAO concentrates on the implementation, understanding, and the standardization of all the elements, towards the achievement of the English Language Proficiency Level 4 as a minimum operational level, equally valid within all Member States.

2.   Discussion

2.1   To improve the safety of aviation globally, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) developed an international standard for language proficiency requirements. An introduction of required English Language Proficiency levels specifically set up for the AIM personnel will assure a more accurate, harmonized and correctly communicated publication of its products. This also enhances the safety-critical information provided to its users (Pilots, ATC, etc.).

2.2   Currently, there is no English Language Proficiency level requirements specifically for AIM personnel (on global level). In the NACC Region, unfortunately, many differences (pronouncements and writing) exist in the way information is communicated by AIM Personnel on the operational level in the English language. This creates higher risks to erroneous information, wrongly formulated sentences and/or misinterpretation to users of the published information in AIPs, SUPs, AICs, NOTAM details and FPL briefings.

2.3   There are no official license requirements associated with AIM Personnel function, which does not obligate any AIM Personnel to obtain a certain level in English Language Proficiency. Nevertheless, while AIM Personnel are expected to provide briefing to aeronautical personnel, publish NOTAMs, AIP, AICs and SUPs, which are operational safety critical information, no proper English level is in place to support the required uniformity in the emission of such information to assure safety in communication.

2.4   There are NACC region States that have implemented AIM Personnel licenses and require them to have proper English. None of these are currently based in a uniform manner, as is prescribed for Air Traffic Controller, Pilots and aeronautical station operators in numerous States, i.e. cabin attendants must have the intermediate, B1, B2 English level is an essential course for the preparation in this career type. The intermediate, B1, B2 English level is equally suitable for those already working in the industry who need to improve their communication skills when carrying out their pre and in-flight responsibilities. In addition, the level of English required to be ICAO Minimum 4 competent, would be under the Common European Framework B2. However, most obtaining ICAO 4 are at the CEF level of A2-B1. If AIM Personnel works with safety critical information in aviation, shouldn't a minimum requirement for its function be of applicability?

2.5   From AIM training classes provided by i.e. IATA, one of the prerequisites of the English language in order to follow the AIS course, is that the minimum recommended level language proficiency of the trainee is the ICAO Operational level 4 in English.

3.   Current Practices

3.1   ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements:

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.

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).

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.		

Expert 6									
Pronunciation		**Structure**		**Vocabulary**		**Fluency**			
Pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation, though possibly influenced by the first language or regional variation, almost never interfere with ease of understanding.	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.	Both basic and complex grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled.	Expert Level 6 speakers do not demonstrate consistent global structural or grammatical errors but may exhibit some local errors.	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.	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.	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.	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.		

4. **Suggested actions**

4.1 The meeting is invited to:

a) review the information provided in this Working Paper and support the proposal to introduce a proper English language proficiency suggestion for AIM personnel, in order to enhance safety and efficiency in the communication provided by AIM Personnel (AIS, ARO, FPL, NOTAM personnel);

b) discuss the development and create documentation for proper English language proficiency suggestions for AIM;

c) approve internally by the AIM TF the created document;

d) submit the final document created to ICAO NACC for further implementation processing; and

e) take any other action that it deems necessary.

— END —