



ICAO

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Agenda Item 8: Any Other Business

WORK OF ICAO LPRI TF BASED ON THE RESULTS OF IATA SURVEY ON LANGUAGE ISSUES IN ATC COMMUNICATION

(Presented by IATA)

SUMMARY

This paper presents the output of the analysis of IATA Survey on Language Issues in ATC Communication, done by a group of subject-matter experts from ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements Implementation Task Force (LPRI TF) Subgroup 2.

The group has prepared some recommendations based on the results of the survey and their expertise, as well as some open questions for further discussion for the consideration of LPRI TF. This work is still ongoing at the ICAO EUR level, but insights thereof could be useful for other ICAO Regions and any feedback via IATA or ICAO will be appreciated.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements Implementation Task Force is a task force under ICAO European Aviation Systems Planning Group (EASPG) that is working on the issues and challenges the aviation industry and regulators are facing with regards to the implementation of ICAO language proficiency requirements (LPRs). Within its framework, among other issues, work is being done on the harmonization of testing systems oversight, requirements for ground handling personnel, general aviation, etc.

1.2 At several recent LPRI TF meetings IATA presented updated analyses of the data related to communication/language issues from its Incident Data Exchange program. A concern was raised that in many cases communication/coordination issues occur in the countries where English is a native language. At LPRI TF45 meeting IATA brought up the issue of communication issues related to native-English speakers (NES) versus non-native English speakers (NNES); while China presented the challenges Chinese crews and ATCOs face in learning and understanding English in ATC communication environment and provided some examples of possible strategies to make messages more understandable for Chinese natives. From the TF discussions, it became clear that the issue requires deeper analysis.

1.3 In 2025, IATA conducted a survey to check the current status on the known issues related to ATC communication. Below are the most important high-level insights from the survey:

- a) pilots still encounter use of non-standard phraseology and communication issues during ATC routine communication with various levels of frequency;

- b) the most common issue is strong local accent (25.38%), followed by non-usage of ICAO Standard Phraseology (22.26%), languages other than English being used (17.42%) and fast speech tempo (16.13%);
- c) the top five countries where language issues occur are China, France, India, Spain and United States;
- d) the top five airports are CDG, JFK, MIA, LAX, CAN;
- e) most pilots (82%) said communication issues had contributed to increased workload or operational risk during flight;
- f) 62.05% of the respondents report communication issues related to language or use of phraseology only when safety is directly affected, while 35.02% never report such issues;
- g) 82.67% of respondents have not received training in ICAO phraseology within the last 12 months;
- h) 65.52% of the respondents hold L5 or L6 or are native speakers and only 14.04% of them received training on accommodation strategies for efficient communication with L4 speakers;
- i) only 57.79% of the respondents feel the training they received is sufficient to maintain communication proficiency;
- j) the most frequently chosen improvement measures by pilots included speaking slowly and clearly, avoiding too much information in one transmission and adherence to standard phraseology;
- k) almost all responding operators have clear policies regarding the use of standard phraseology by flight crew, but less than half of the operators routinely monitor and track communication issues (44.78%), 34.33% do it partially, while 20.9% do not monitor communication issues;
- l) more than half of the operators (58.21%) very rarely receive safety reports involving phraseology or ATC communication issues;
- m) only 56.06% of operators have formal measures to routinely monitor the appropriate use of standard phraseology, within the operation;
- n) 44.62% regularly share lessons learnt with flight crew on non-standard phraseology or communication issues, and 40% share them sometimes;
- o) only 65.15% believe that current training methods adequately prepare flight crew for phraseology use in multilingual environment;
- p) only 38.46% assess language proficiency and phraseology skills regularly beyond licensing requirements, and 16.92% assess them only when issues arise;
- q) only 24.24% provide formal guidance to enhance a pilot's ability to communicate with non-native English-speaking ATC units, another 28.79% do it informally. Only 25.76% provide formal guidance to enhance a pilot's ability to communicate with native English-speaking ATC units, another 22.73% do it informally;
- r) 62.12% do not provide any training for native speakers of English or L5/L6 license holders on accommodation strategies for efficient communication with Level 4 speakers; 18.18% provide informal training;
- s) almost 70% of responding operators participate in local Runway Safety Teams; and

- t) the operators and the pilots shared their views on what measures could improve safety with regards to ATC communication and language proficiency. They were considered by the LPRI TF subject-matter experts in their analysis.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The results of this survey were presented at LPRI TF47 meeting and the meeting decided that these results should be analysed in more detail by Subgroup 2 of the LPRI TF. A group of SMEs from IATA, Croatia and North Macedonia, led by the LPRI TF Chair, volunteered to participate in this analysis and brought their valuable subject-matter expertise. The outputs of the analysis are presented in **Appendix A** to this paper.

2.2 The group has identified some major challenges based on the survey results and their own expertise. The challenges that seemed related to each other were grouped together for easier perception. For each of the challenges the SMEs proposed potential recommended actions for various stakeholders. However, some open questions are left for a wider discussion by LPRI TF.

2.3 Some of the proposed actions can be done at the LPRI TF level, but some require escalation to a global level within ICAO. The group understands that solving a lot of these challenges will require time, so the easiest step would be to start with a regional workshop to raise awareness of the existing challenges, discuss possible criteria for establishing a communication competence and show examples of adaptation strategies for L5 and L6 speakers. The workshop will be adjacent to the next LPRI TF meeting.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

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

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES, PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS AND OPEN QUESTIONS FOR LPRI TF

Challenges	Source of intelligence	Proposed recommendations	Questions for LPRI TF open discussion
Local languages being used in ATC communication along or instead of English – it decreases the level of situational awareness for international crews who may not speak local languages	IATA survey Pilots Q7 IATA survey Pilots Q9 SME expertise	Advocacy efforts to urge States to ensure English only at international airports	How could we ensure this at a global level?
ICAO standard phraseology not being used as prescribed, or Standard phraseology in a State is different from ICAO standard phraseology 82.67% of respondents have not received training in ICAO phraseology within the last 12 months	IATA survey Pilots Q8 IATA survey Pilots Q9 IATA survey Pilots Q17 SME expertise	All stakeholders to emphasize the use of standard phraseology in all situations that are covered by standard RTF Promote that States do not deviate from ICAO standard phraseology Promote the need for monitoring of the use of ICAO phraseology and recurrent training in case of phraseology updates and/or degradation of skills	Could LPRI TF members provide examples of differences in/deviations from phraseology for the workshop? Should ICAO Doc 4444 be revised? Is it possible to collect data on the most common errors?
Strong local accent and fast speech tempo are among the most common language-related issues Putting too much information to one transmission causes confusion Existing L5/L6 rating criteria encourage dangerous behaviors (use of slang, phrasal verbs, complex structures and language) (should we switch to	IATA survey Pilots Q9, Q18, Q19, Q20 IATA survey Operators Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12 SME expertise	Revision of the rating principles and timelines LPRI TF to organize a pilot safety awareness workshop in EUR Region (involve IATA, IFALPA, IFATCA, ICAEA, language training and testing SMEs) considering the following aspects:	Could your organization contribute to the development and delivery of the workshop's contents? Do you know any positive examples of training adapted to specific articulatory peculiarities that has helped to make a local accent more comprehensive?

Operational/Non-Operational only? – discussed at PTLP) Lack of standardization of NES (accent, vocabulary); NES mistakenly taken as role models for L6 65.52% of the respondents hold L5 or L6 or are native speakers and only 14.04% of them received training on accommodation strategies for efficient communication with L4 speakers Attitude issues (NNES feeling uncomfortable to challenge NES, NES feeling superior or irritated at NNES, etc) Only 57.79% of the respondents feel the training they received is sufficient to maintain communication proficiency Only 38.46% of responding operators assess language proficiency and phraseology skills regularly beyond licensing requirements, and 16.92% assess them only when issues arise Not enough/no training on the use of English in multicultural environment (Only 24.24% of responding operators provide formal guidance to enhance a pilot's ability to communicate with non-native English-speaking ATC units, another 28.79% do it informally; Only 25.76% provide formal guidance to enhance a pilot's ability to communicate		- For raters and trainers – how to identify if the accent interferes with the ease of understanding - How to train and monitor comprehensive pronunciation of NES and NNES, where articulatory basis varies significantly - How to maintain ICAO recommended speech tempo and use shorter transmissions with consideration to density of traffic and workload of ATCOs - How to develop adaptation skills (paraphrase, shorter phrases, simpler vocabulary and grammar, putting less information in one transmission) - How to explain the human factors related to the feeling of the language by NES vs NNES and develop the right attitudes in both - How to switch from pure language proficiency concept to an overall communication competence (what would be the criteria?) - How to prepare crews/ATCOs for communication with respect to	Do you have other ideas for the aspects to be covered? Are there any studies that show that language skills of L6 speakers deteriorate with time? Would you support proposing PTLP to introduce the concept of communication competence rather than of purely LPRs based on CBTA principles with the relevant modification of the ICAO rating scale? Could you support creating communication competency training/testing principles?
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with native English-speaking ATC units, another 22.73% do it informally)		national/airport-specific peculiarities - Emphasize primary use of standard RTF over plain language	
Among the Top 20 countries and Top 20 airports with most reported issues there are countries/airports beyond the ICAO EUR Region, thus, outside of LPRI TF influence Some States may formally claim that they comply with ICAO LPRs, which in reality might be wrong Lack of oversight over training/testing and monitoring of RTF in operations Non-harmonized training and testing; Test shopping	IATA survey Pilots Q9, Q10 SME expertise	Invite States where communication issues are mentioned more frequently to participate in LPRI TF (Start with European States: France, Spain, Italy, UK, Germany, Turkey) Propose via ICAO YMQ to create LPRI TFs in other ICAO Regions to identify gaps or invite States from other Regions to LPRI TF EUR and/or elevate the issues raised to ICAO PTLF Raise awareness: regional workshops/webinars, round tables involving pilots and ATCOs within different regions and native/non-native speakers Consider involving CANSO and IFATCA in the work of LPRI Make use of RSTs, CASTs, etc Consider the possibility of targeted advocacy/action plans for the most reported airports Advocate for harmonization of regulation and oversight	

Almost half of such issues occurred during general ATC clearances (46.73%), followed by taxi clearances (18.74%), approach clearances (13.62%) and route/re-route clearances (13.83%)	IATA survey Pilots Q12 SME expertise	Highlight the achievement of lowest numbers during critical phases of flight: Take off and Landing clearances are reported as only rarely occurring Cross-check with EASA and ECTL data	Do we need to pay specific attention to clearances at critical flight phases or in general?
Only 12.5% said they never revert to plain language in high workload, while the rest mentioned various degree of likelihood that they would use plain language	IATA survey Pilots Q13 SME expertise		Do we need to consider stress in training/testing? How can we recreate it?
Most pilots (82%) said communication issues had contributed to increased workload or operational risk during flight	IATA survey Pilots Q15 SME expertise	Emphasize the importance of improving communication discipline	
Technical factors: - Issues with radio coverage - Noise and distractions - Frequency and airport congestion - Use of free text in CPDLC - Potential integration of Gen-AI into pilot-ATCO communication	IATA survey Pilots Q14, 20 IATA survey operators Q15 SME expertise	Raise awareness and advocate for: - Improved radio coverage - Stick to sterile cockpit concept - ATCO workload distribution, airspace design - Discipline in use of CPDLC, avoid free text, or use simplified technical language and develop writing skills - Consider trustworthiness of AI-tools before implementation	Is it possible to train/test focus in noisy/distracting environment?
Language /miscommunication have a high level of not being reported as it is	IATA survey Pilots Q16	Industry and States to encourage pilots/ATCOs to report all communication	What are the ways for States/airlines to monitor line ATC communication to

not mandatory by the ECAIRS, Regulation or the internal SMS of the ATC/Airlines Only 56.06% of operators have formal measures to routinely monitor the appropriate use of standard phraseology, within the operation Accident/serious incidents investigation final reports might not explicitly include language considerations (safety barrier vs contributing factor; lack of linguistic competence in AAIBs) Language-related classifiers not present/not sufficient in reporting taxonomies	IATA survey Operators Q6, Q7 SME expertise	issues and ensure a proper follow-up process, involving communication between airlines vs ANSPs in accordance with their SMS to ensure corrective actions are taken, especially for repetitive events Highlight to the AIG that communication aspects could include language during investigation and appropriate expertise should be involved; Include a requirement for testing organizations to keep the testing records Review and amend relevant taxonomies, if needed	identify deviation from standard phraseology and communication challenges/non-compliance; readback/hearback and use of mike discipline? Is it possible to include communication issues management in training scenarios?
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