

ELEVENTH AIR NAVIGATION CONFERENCE

Montreal, 22 September to 3 October 2003

Agenda Item 2: Safety and security in air traffic management (ATM)

2.1 Safety management systems and programmes :

COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

(Presented by the International Federation of
Air Line Pilots' Associations — IFALPA)

SUMMARY

Incidents have occurred where pilots and controllers using the same term have not had the same understanding. Ambiguity is one of safety's worst enemies. Measures should be taken to ensure that a common understanding of terms and definitions prevails among different States that use the same language. Involving the end user at the planning stage will help find the most appropriate terms, the ones that leave no ambiguity in their meaning amongst all that use them.

Action by the conference is at paragraph 4.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Adopted ICAO documents are equally authentic in any of the six official languages. However, it is common practice to use English as the working language at the working group level of most ICAO Panels, Planning and Implementation Regional Groups (PIRGs), etc. At a later stage, the documentation is translated into the other languages.

1.2 This works well for Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) and technical manuals. Yet, problems have been encountered with material related to the operational environment. Difficulties arise as ICAO's translation workforce, although very highly qualified, does not have operational background

knowledge, and for the most part, does not necessarily represent all the States that speak a given language, much less all its dialects.

1.3 In the case of phraseology, for example, the semantics of a phrase may not be related to the intention of the term in the original text.

2. THE REGIONS END UP WITH THE PROBLEM

2.1 An example of this is the Spanish phraseology.

2.2 There are more than twenty Spanish-speaking States, using different variations of the same language. The best terms for aeronautical phraseology have been researched; unfortunately not all States have been represented in that process. As a result, some technical terms used in the *Procedures for Air Navigation Services — Air Traffic Management* (ICAO PANS-ATM, Doc 4444) are difficult to accept by aeronautical technical personnel in some regions with regard to human factors issues, creating unnecessary confusion.

2.3 IFALPA considers that it is possible to end up with a regional answer that will not solve the problem unless a global solution to the problem is sought.

2.4 Incidents have occurred where pilots and controllers using the same term have not had the same understanding. Ambiguity is one of safety's worst enemies. When the semantics of a term does not relate to its intention in a derivation of a given language, technical aeronautical personnel have great difficulty in adopting such a term.

3. GLOBAL USER INVOLVEMENT FOR SEAMLESS OPERATIONS

3.1 IFALPA accepts the fact that an ICAO document in any of the official ICAO languages is equally valid. However, when issuing documents with text to be used in an operational context, such as the PANS-ATM, measures should be taken to ensure that a common understanding of terms and definitions prevails among different States that use the same language.

3.2 IFALPA considers that a joint effort should be made amongst affected users (pilots, controllers, etc.) to find practical terms that eliminate ambiguity in their use. This will be the only way that the entire community of technical aeronautical personnel can be convinced to use the standard phraseology. Otherwise the years will pass and we will continue to study how to accomplish a way for everybody to use that phraseology.

3.3 Using a data base and the Internet to circulate proposals subject to interpretation by the end users (pilots and controllers) will enrich them and certainly help determine the most appropriate terms from a practical perspective. Input from people in the front line at the planning phase well before a State letter is drafted should be encouraged.

3.4 Involving the end user at the planning stage will help find the most appropriate terms, the ones that leave no ambiguity in their meaning amongst all that use them. In a way, the Phraseology Task Force of the ATM/CNS Committee of CAR/SAM Regional Planning and Implementation Group (GREPECAS) is experimenting with a methodology using the above principal to review the Spanish phraseology published in the PANS/ATM. A seamless use among Spanish-speaking States of the ICAO Spanish phraseology will no doubt emerge.

4. ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE

4.1 The conference is invited to:

- a) note the information provided in this paper;
- b) use all available electronic means to obtain feedback from technical aeronautical personnel (i.e. pilots and controllers) to ensure that a common understanding of terms and definitions prevails among different States that use the same language; and
- c) follow the events at the GREPECAS Phraseology Task Force and build from their experience.

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