

Sharing Resources for English Language Improvement in International Aviation:

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This talk will highlight and define those areas where the idea of co-operation, enshrined in ICAO Doc 9835, will assist the role of specialist language trainers and test item writers. It will outline steps taken by trainers and others to form self help groups in the form of associations, conferences and web based discussion forums and will suggest how these initiatives would greatly benefit from support, by the aviation industry as a whole, as part of the resources sharing ethos.

Introduction

Aviation is a strange hybrid industry in which public bodies, international organisations and private companies rub shoulders, co-exist and interdepend.

The recent changes to the ICAO SARPs on language proficiency have been instigated by an international, non commercial body yet the quasi-totality of the expense incurred by their implementation must be borne by the private sector or public sector enterprises funded partly from commercial profit.

Not only are private enterprise companies averse to expenditure which does not have a clear and evident financial impact on 'the bottom line', they are also averse to any activity which might be seen as directly aiding their competitors.

The concept of an altruistic, co-operation between competing businesses is not well enshrined in modern commercial practice.

Yet, ICAO Document 9835 which accompanies and explains the changes to the ICAO SARPs concerning aviation communications and the use of English, and which is an essential element of the changes, makes multiple references to such practices. It describes them in terms which indicate that they play an integral part in the success of the 'better language for better safety' ethos of the new SARPs.

For, example:

Doc 9835 3.2.3

When the original principles of radiotelephony communication were established, emphasis was placed on the requirement for international cooperation in developing a solution to the problems of voice communication. Although the objectives laid out in the original document have been supplanted by advances in linguistic understanding, the call for close international cooperation remains. The burden can be shared in a number of ways:

e) English-speaking organizations can invest in the development of high-quality aviation-related English language learning materials; and

f) some English-speaking organizations, airlines or training centres, may wish to explore how they might provide cost-efficient English language learning opportunities to code share partners or other airlines at minimal cost.

Doc 9853 4.3.6

Aviation content specialization

“ESL teachers can best teach aviation English if they are familiar with the content material. They can gain familiarity in a number of ways: by experience in aviation, through experience in aviation English teaching, or through a short course designed to provide such familiarity (a flight ground school course, for example). With an introduction to aviation content, experienced English for specific purposes teachers should be able to select, modify, and exploit content appropriate to the classroom needs of students.

Optimum aviation English training solutions are developed consistently over time, with committed and qualified individuals motivated to stay the long course of aviation English materials development and with continued support from Subject Matter Experts. Because aviation technical familiarity is not gained overnight, more so than in other English language teaching endeavours, organizations will want to invest in talented, capable teachers who will be able to commit to long-term materials development projects.

The role of aviation experts in the aviation language teaching environment is to guide the language teacher towards appropriate content material and to maintain a high degree of technical accuracy in the language learning materials. Aviation experts with instructional experience will make the best "partners," able to contribute most positively to the language training”.

Doc 9853 6.5.1

Test development

“Best practice in language test development can be said to occur when representatives from all stakeholders participate in the process: pilots, controllers, administrators, operational trainers and aviation language trainers, guided by and working with applied linguists with a specialist background in language test development. Language teachers are accustomed to developing and giving tests for a number of classroom training or diagnostic reasons, and for lower-stakes testing situations that customary practice is reasonable and useful”.

Doc 9853 8.2.1

Materials Development

“One of the particular challenges facing aviation English teachers is the relative lack of commercially available and high-quality aviation specific language learning materials. Until more and better quality materials are available, teachers will need to continue to develop their own materials”.

These quotations from ICAO Doc 9835 suggest a world of co-operative, mutual help in the arena of the SARPs regarding language proficiency requirements.

The licensing requirements for ICAO SARPs LPRs represent a need which exists entirely within the professional and commercial aviation operational environment.

However, this is a need which cannot be satisfied entirely from within that environment. The industry will need the help of specialists from outside the industry to undertake language training and testing, at least in the first instance.

The lack of materials and training possibilities mentioned in ICAO Doc 9835 were highlighted in a paper which I gave at the very same meeting in which the new SARPs and language proficiency requirements were first announced to the world by ICAO representatives. This was back in 2002 at the ICAEA forum in Warsaw.

Since that time, a lot of heat has been generated in the testing industry to produce a test - any test - in time for 2008 but there has been a distinctly different and more reticent approach from the pre-test, classroom training, teacher training and training materials production sector.

Evidence of co-operative initiatives between the aviation industry proper and English language training providers, particularly in under resourced regions, are equally difficult to find.

A shining exception is the EU-South East Asia Civil Aviation Project, funded by the EU and the European Aviation Industry through ASD in which I recently had the privilege to participate. This initiative was not spawned directly by the new SARPs but my own small part in the English language training element of it was able to be adapted to incorporate some aspects of preparation for 2008.

This is one outstanding example of International Co-operation in the Aviation English Language field which was independent of the introduction of the new SARPs and concerns about March 2008.

Another remarkable co-operative venture is The International Civil Aviation English Association (ICAEA)

The task of ICAEA has been, since its inception in 1991, to try to bring together a group of like-minded individuals for mutual professional support and to generate and co-ordinate interest in the English training element of International Civil Aviation. This was reflected in the organising of regular seminars (including the 2002 Warsaw seminar jointly with ICAO) and, latterly, by setting up the ICAEA web site (<http://www.icaea.pata.pl/>) generously and freely hosted by the Polish Air Traffic Agency. Apart from the generous contribution by our Polish colleagues, ICAEA has spectacularly failed to generate any substantial sponsorship from the aviation industry. A sad fact for ICAEA but a black mark for the industry as a whole.

ICAEA as a body has continued to work over the years to bring together the two sides of the industry for mutual co-operation. It was an obvious vehicle through which the co-operative spirit could have been nurtured. However, apart from the bi-ennial seminars which restarted in 2005 and of which there is due to be one in August this year, ICAEA, because of a lack of funding, has not been able to provide a permanent on-line or other service to those needing help and advice. The framework is perfect, the execution is lacking. Underfunded and under-resourced ICAEA has struggled to make the impact it deserved.

The industry generosity factor which would have made all the difference has been glaringly absent. Not generosity, in fact, as it now emerges, but investment. An opportunity to proactively invest in the aim of long term aviation safety.

The Wandering Albatross

The body of dedicated Aviation English teachers which exists in the world today (probably no more than 200 who have both the experience and the subject knowledge to work autonomously in the field) have had to wander errantly like the proverbial albatross until, by great good fortune, they collided with a colleague or an enlightened employer. The other several thousands who have found themselves pitched headlong into the aviation English training arena (read literally the cockpit) have done so from a background of zero knowledge of the aviation industry and in many cases with a scant knowledge of advanced language teaching procedures.

Many of them have done wonders in a short time and some have been lucky to have found excellent employers who have offered professional support. These teachers are heroes and their employers deserve praise. Others, have fallen among lacklustre and unenlightened employers who offer little support and, in

any case, fail almost entirely to appreciate what the essence of English for Aviation teaching is all about. These are the ones, the majority I fear and a growing band, who really need a support group. These are the people whom the industry, as a whole, needs to help.

Who is 'The Industry'?

"The Industry" means anyone who participates in or benefits from the exercise of civil aviation business. Airlines, airport operators, aircraft manufacturers, engine manufacturers, ground handling companies, catering companies, aircraft leasing firms, commercial aviation training schools, and commercial (privatised) and state-run Air Navigation Service Providers who derive the greater part of their income from navigation charges on the industry as a whole.

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(Slide) A simple solution:

Ticket price:

Outbound flight	170.00
Fuel tax	20.00
Fuel Surcharge	15.00
Airport Security Tax	15.00
Language Training Tax	1.00

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A Third Example of International Co-Operation

The Flightenglish Forum (flightenglish-subscribe@yahoogroups.co.uk) is a purely voluntary, non-subscription, web-based, discussion group set up to gather together a group of like-minded language training experts and teachers who share ideas and discuss the solutions to problems. It shares this aim with the less active ICAEA Web forum (icaea_world-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

The Flightenglish forum has now almost 100 members from countries ranging from Argentina to Vietnam and generates both lively discussion and in-depth analysis of the problems facing the aviation language training community.

This is an example of spontaneous co-operation among trainers. We use this system because it is free to organise and can be run on a voluntary basis. This is the only way that we can interchange ideas because there is no possibility of using any system which costs money. To pay the \$500 entry fee to this Montreal seminar has been an enormous financial sacrifice for those teachers who are determined to be here because they know that this is the only way in which they can be abreast of the latest thinking and to get themselves ready for the challenges of 2008. Many others, sadly, could not even contemplate being here because they, or their organisations, simply cannot afford it. Some may have asked for commercial sponsorship, few will have received it.

This would be a first obvious step for the industry to take, namely, to provide financial and material support, to the language training community which is, in the main, composed of individual trainers working in precarious circumstances.

How Else Can the Industry Help?

1. Set up or Sponsor training schemes for teachers of aviation English to increase the pool of qualified professionals.
2. Intervene directly in the testing and training scene by setting up an industry-wide not-for-profit oversight agency. (see the Association of Raters proposed by Henry Emery)

3. Co-operate with materials writers and test item writers by providing access to authentic aviation text. In particular, it is illegal in most countries to listen to or to record radio telephony transmissions. This severely restricts the teacher who, firstly, wants to obtain a familiarity with radio telephony and phraseology and, secondly, the teacher who wishes to use authentic training examples in the classroom or the test item writer who wishes to make meaningful practice or real tests. Those training to teach English in the context of the ICAO LPRs must have a good grounding in this aspect of language use. The industry and national bodies must intervene to ensure that such training materials are available to potential teachers.

4. Be open to teachers requiring advice or help with the creation of materials.

5. Include in company or organisation websites an educational section containing English language materials designed by and for language teachers which can be freely copied and used royalty free. This can include samples of documents, charts, manuals, recorded interviews with company personnel talking about their jobs and telling work-related anecdotes. Photos and diagrams which can be used free of copyright to help in the preparation of classroom materials. Apart from anything else, this can be a powerful source of positive brand publicity and will attract others, such as high school students creating projects, to learn more about the company in question. The company which provides the richest and most generous site will get the most prestige. Those who produce a mean and pay-to-view site will get the reputation they deserve.

Conclusion

All stakeholders must recognise the crucial role the language training and testing community are being asked to play in meeting the challenge of 5th March 2008.

Most investment in the solutions so far seems to be coming from the language training and testing community. Much of this is pure commercial investment driven, quite rightly by the hope of commercial return. Most of it is un-coordinated and none of it is regulated.

Henry Emery has put forward a solution to the regulation of language raters. This will require the co-operation of the industry (which means hands in pockets or pocket books) if it has any chance of success. After that, will come the provision of materials. So far, only one publisher, Macmillan, has had the courage to commission a training textbook aimed at those preparing for the ICAO LPRs. I wish them luck.

But the industry as a whole may have to encourage other publishers, especially in developing countries, to produce affordable materials for their home market by offering subsidies or guarantees.

Lastly, the industry must proactively enter the education field with English language enhancement programmes as a priority. This will involve opening doors to teachers and materials writers and the funding of language research in the specialist field of air ground communications.

This must be regarded as investment and not as expenditure. It is an investment in overall aviation safety but it is an investment also in communicative efficiency which will, in the end, reduce costs as well as saving human lives. It is an investment worth making. Above all, it can be a source of very favourable publicity for those who are prepared to engage generously in it, as ICAO has suggested.