INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION

EIGHTH MEETING OF CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITIES OF THE SAM REGION (RAAC/8)

Buenos Aires, Argentina, 23 – 25 April, 2003

Agenda Item 8: Other Matters

Status of English Language Standard for Use in Civil Aviation

(Presented by Drazen Gardilcic, FAA Representative to the PRICE Group)

SUMMARY

This paper presents the status of ICAO's implementation plans for the establishment of a worldwide minimum English language standard for use in civil aviation. It also describes changes to Annexes and guidance material that will require the use of English as the common standard when the pilots and controllers are unable to communicate in the language of the station on the ground.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Communications, or the lack thereof, has been shown by many accident investigations to play a significant role those accidents. Of 28,000 Aviation Safety Reporting System reports, 70% cite problems related to information transfer.

1.2   The ICAO 32nd Assembly Resolution A32-16, called "for steps to ensure that air traffic controllers and flight crews involved in flight operations in airspace where the use of English is required, are proficient in conducting and comprehending radiotelephony communications in the English language."

1.3 Currently the only reference to an English language requirement exists in ICAO Annex 10 ICAO (Vol I, 5.2.1.1.2) to the International Chicago Convention recommending that the English language be used for universal use in international aeronautical radiotelephony communications. Note should be taken that this is currently a recommendation only and NOT a standard.

1.4   In order to implement resolution A32-16, ICAO Annexes and its SARPS the ICAO Council created the Proficiency In Common English (PRICE) study group. The group was tasked with producing the appropriate changes to Annexes and related documents to make the English language an ICAO standard an also to define the minimum English level that must be displayed by aviation users in that language.

1.5   The first meeting of the PRICE SG convened in November 2000. PRICE participation included representatives from Argentina, Canada, China, France, Russia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States, EUROCONTROL, IATA, IFALPA, IFATCA and ICAO. Subsequently, PRICE met two other times, once in 2000 and again in 2001.

1.6   The PRICE group was made up of experts in air traffic control, pilots, English instructors and linguists. The groups work concentrated in two areas where change was needed. First, the group decided after careful scrutiny that the minimum English language level for speaking and comprehension needed to be determined. Once that standard was defined, the group concentrated on defining language to amend the appropriate Annexes and other ICAO guidance material as necessary.

1.7   In its deliberations the group agreed that the case for *English* as the language of international civil aviation is much less political than it is pragmatic. Because language is so closely tied to our sense of national and cultural identity, humans are very naturally sensitive to issues of language use and policy PRICE Study Group.

1.8   In the case of international aviation, however, perhaps more than in any other arena, English sheds all connection to political agendas, real or perceived, and becomes simply another tool for increased safety and efficiency of aviation operations.

2.0   DISCUSSION

2.1 Based on recommendations from PRICE, the Secretariat submitted proposals to amend Annexes 1, 6, 10, 11 and Doc 4444 PANS-ATM to the Air Navigation Commission in November of last year. The proposals were outlined in a State Letter, which was sent to the States last May.

2.2 Annex 10 Change Proposal
> **The air ground radiotelephony communications shall be conducted in the language normally used by the station on the ground or in the English language. 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.**

2.3 Annex 1 Change Proposal   (two phases)
> **Recommendation: Flight crews, air traffic controllers and aeronautical station operators should demonstrate the ability to speak and understand the language used for radiotelephony communications to the level specified in the language proficiency requirements in the Appendix. (Appendix A)**

> **Standard: 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) (Appendix A).**

2.4 Annex 6 Change Proposal

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

2.5 Annex 11 Change Proposals

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

2.6 Doc 4444 Change Proposal

"…ATS personnel and other ground personnel will be expected to use **plain language to the level specified in the ICAO language proficiency requirements contained in Annex 1 – Personnel Licensing"**

3.0   CONCLUSION

3.1 The ICAO council approved these changes in March of this year. States are invited to note the information contained in this paper and consider appropriate action to fulfill the new English language standard requirements to be implemented by 2008.

- - - - -

APPENDIX A

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS
(Chapter 1, 1.2.9.1, 1.2.9.2 and 1.2.9.3 refer)

1.   **General**

Note.—The ICAO language proficiency requirements include the holistic descriptors at paragraph 2 below and the ICAO Operational Level (Level 4) of the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale in the Attachment.

    a.   To meet the language proficiency requirements contained in Chapter 1, 1.2.9.1, 1.2.9.2, and 1.2.9.3, an applicant for a licence or a licence holder shall demonstrate, in a manner acceptable to the licensing authority, compliance with the holistic descriptors at paragraph 2 below and with the ICAO Operational Level (Level 4) of the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale in the Attachment.

1.   **Holistic descriptors**

Proficient speakers shall:

a)   communicate effectively in voice-only (telephone/radiotelephone) and in face-to-face situations;

b)   communicate on common, concrete and work-related topics with accuracy and clarity;

c)   use appropriate communicative strategies to exchange messages and to recognise and resolve misunderstandings (e.g. to check, confirm, or clarify information) in a general or work-related context;

d)   handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine work situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar; and

e)   use a dialect or accent which is intelligible to the aeronautical community.

1. ICAO language proficiency rating scale: Expert, Extended and Operational Levels.

LEVEL	PRONUNCIATION ASSUMES A DIALECT AND/OR ACCENT INTELLIGIBLE TO THE AERONAUTICAL COMMUNITY.	STRUCTURE RELEVANT GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES AND SENTENCE PATTERNS ARE DETERMINED BY LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS APPROPRIATE TO THE TASK.	VOCABULARY	FLUENCY	COMPREHENSION	INTERACTIONS
EXPERT 6	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, though possibly influenced by the first language or regional variation, almost never interfere with understanding.	Both basic and complex grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled.	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.	Able to speak at length with a natural, effortless flow. Varies speech flow for stylistic effect, e.g. to emphasise a point. Uses appropriate discourse markers and connectors spontaneously.	Comprehension is consistently accurate in nearly all contexts and includes comprehension of linguistic and cultural subtleties.	Interacts with ease in nearly all situations. Is sensitive to verbal and non-verbal cues, and responds to them appropriately.
EXTENDED 5	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, though influenced by the first language or regional variation, rarely interfere with understanding.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled. Complex structures are attempted but with errors which sometimes interfere with meaning.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete, and work related topics. Paraphrases consistently and successfully. Vocabulary is sometimes idiomatic.	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.	Comprehension is accurate on common, concrete, and work related topics and mostly accurate when the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events. Is able to comprehend a range of speech varieties (dialect and/or accent) or registers.	Responses are immediate, appropriate, and informative. Manages the speaker/listener relationship effectively.
OPERATIONAL LEVEL 4	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation but only sometimes interfere with understanding.	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.	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.	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.	Comprehension is mostly accurate on common, concrete, and work related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. When the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events, comprehension may be slower or require clarification strategies.	Responses are usually immediate, appropriate, and informative. Initiates and maintains exchanges even when dealing with an unexpected turn of events. Deals adequately with apparent misunderstandings by checking, confirming, or clarifying.
LEVELS 1, 2 AND 3 ARE ON SUBSEQUENT PAGE						

1. ICAO language proficiency rating scale: Pre-Operational, Elementary and Pre-Elementary Levels.

LEVEL	PRONUNCIATION ASSUMES A DIALECT AND/OR ACCENT INTELLIGIBLE TO THE AERONAUTICAL COMMUNITY.	STRUCTURE RELEVANT GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES AND SENTENCE PATTERNS ARE DETERMINED BY LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS APPROPRIATE TO THE TASK.	VOCABULARY	FLUENCY	COMPREHENSION	INTERACTIONS
			LEVELS 4, 5 AND 6 ARE ON PRECEDING PAGE			
PRE-OPERATIONAL 3	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation and frequently interfere with understanding.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns associated with predictable situations are not always well controlled. Errors frequently interfere with meaning.	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.	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.	Comprehension is often accurate on common, concrete, and work related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. May fail to understand a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events.	Responses are sometimes immediate, appropriate, and informative. Can initiate and maintain exchanges with reasonable ease on familiar topics and in predictable situations. Generally inadequate when dealing with an unexpected turn of events.
ELEMENTARY 2	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are heavily influenced by the first language or regional variation and usually interfere with understanding.	Shows only limited control of a few simple memorized grammatical structures and sentence patterns.	Limited vocabulary range consisting only of isolated words and memorized phrases.	Can produce very short, isolated, memorized utterances with frequent pausing and a distracting use of fillers to search for expressions and to articulate less familiar words.	Comprehension is limited to isolated, memorized phrases when they are carefully and slowly articulated.	Response time is slow, and often inappropriate. Interaction is limited to simple routine exchanges.
PRE-ELEMENTARY 1	Performs at a level below the elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.

Note.—The Operational Level (Level 4) is the minimum required proficiency level for radiotelephony communication. Levels 1 through 3 describe Pre-elementary, Elementary, and Pre-operational levels of language proficiency respectively, all of which describe a level of proficiency below the ICAO language proficiency requirement. Levels 5 and 6 describe Extended and Expert levels, at levels of proficiency more advanced than the minimum required Standard. As a whole, the scale will serve as benchmarks for training and testing, in assisting candidates to attain the ICAO Operational Level (Level 4).

End of new text.