

Proceedings of the International Aviation English Conference (12th forum)

Training and Testing – the same aim?

Hosted by the Agência Nacional de Aviação Civil (ANAC), Brasília, Brazil
12th-13th November 2012

Introduction

The International Aviation English Conference, which was held in Brasília on 12th and 13th November, was ICAEA's second event in South America and built on the success of the seminar held in Buenos Aires at the end of September 2011. ICAEA was fortunate enough to be hosted by the Brazilian Agência Nacional de Aviação Civil (ANAC) in their new offices. Lavish hospitality in the form of delicious coffee breaks and a cornucopia reception on Monday evening complemented the seamless organisation and attention to detail throughout the preparation and delivery of the conference. ICAEA is extremely grateful to ANAC's Director, **Carlos Eduardo Magalhães da Silveira Pellegrino** and General Manager, **Paulo Cesar Requena da Silva**, for the generosity with which they supported this event. Moreover, without the boundless patience, energy, good humour and enthusiasm of **Angela Carolina de Moraes Garcia** and her colleagues the conference would not have been the unqualified success it was. The warmth and ease of Brazilian hospitality and personal interaction contributed greatly to the quality of the informal discussions. Some 89 delegates gathered from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Luxembourg, Paraguay, UK, Uruguay and the USA. Cambridge University Press, Global Aviation English, Macmillan and RMIT exhibited in the coffee break area.

Day One was devoted to training and moderated by **Philip Shawcross**; Day Two to testing and was moderated by **Adrian Enright**. A number of plenary presentations were made in the mornings and moderated breakout sessions were organised in four groups in the afternoons with plenary feedback sessions ending the day. One of the reasons for which the exchanges and discussions were particularly fruitful was the fact that the different types of stakeholder (regulators, pilots, controllers, teachers, examiners, raters, test designers etc.) were equally well represented. We were very impressed by the very professional way in which both ANAC (as regards pilots) and ICEA (as regards controllers) were approaching the implementation of the Language Proficiency Requirements in Brazil. In both cases the Authorities had recruited and formed very well qualified teams of language and subject matter experts within their institutions and had made deliberate efforts to encourage the commitment of all stake holders.

Day 1 - Monday 12th November

ANAC's Director, **Carlos Eduardo Magalhães da Silveira Pellegrino**, addressed the conference and made very clear his awareness of the safety aspects of good practice and language proficiency in communication. In **Philip Shawcross'** (ICAEA) presentation on *The role of ICAEA in today's changing world*, there was a brief reminder of the association's origins in the first forum organised by Fiona Robertson and her colleagues in Paris in March 1984 as well as ICAEA's fundamental aim of building bridges between nations and professions. Philip stressed the importance of each person's awareness of and responsibility for improving and maintaining standards of language proficiency; any chain was only as strong as its weakest link: there was a danger that we substituted complacency for compliance. There were real concerns about the current state of Language Proficiency Requirement (LPR) implementation. Language was among the key skills to be mastered by the next generation of aviation professionals. Philip pointed out that the expertise existed in South America to develop cooperation and conduct new projects. He recalled that we

should aim at integrating language as a core transversal professional competency; that proficiency was not about what you know, but about what you can do; and that with more widespread awareness of the nature of communicative proficiency all stakeholders could work together more effectively.

Ana Lúcia Tavares Monteiro (ANAC) gave an outstanding talk on *Threats to oral comprehension in a multicultural context*. She demonstrated how different professional, national, regional sub-cultures existed within a single workplace. Readback / hearback was often an occasion for misunderstanding. In her research Ana Lucia had formed a series of focus groups from which she had most illuminating quotations and recordings. She referred to Grice's cooperative principle acting in radiotelephony communication. Ana Lucia reminded us that using discipline, standard phraseology, good transmitting technique, transmitting at the correct time and for the correct purpose all contributed to safer practice. She invited people to do her on-line survey '<http://bit.ly/surveyana>'

Ana Eliza Pereira Bocorny (Pontificia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul) spoke about *Language proficiency training – the challenge for pilots*. Ana runs one of the research labs devoted to aviation English in her university. She reminded the conference that pilots also required other language skills: reading and writing, as well as communication on the ground, especially for dealing with discrepancy items (Minimum Equipment List). More data was needed to describe specialised language. Ana advocated research projects based on linguistic corpus principles.

Patricia Tosqui Lucks and **Jairo Roberto da Silva** (ICEA – Instituto de Controle do Espaço Aéreo, the training organisation of the military Brazilian Departamento de Controle do Espaço Aéreo) presented the challenges of air traffic control in Brazil with 4,000 controllers covering such a vast territory. An implementation plan for the training and use of facilitators (PCA 37-9) had been drafted. Considerable efforts had been made recently to insist on the use of standard phraseology and ensure effective training: CTP 010, English for ATCOs, was a 120-hour, three-week course run by two teachers: a language expert and a subject matter expert. A specific proficiency assessment (EPLIS) had been developed. Care was taken to involve controllers in the proficiency process and raise their awareness.

Norma Bravo (CIPE, Argentina) spoke about *Using ICAO's Rated Speech Samples for teaching*. Norma had found the training aid a very useful means of raising awareness of what constitutes an acceptable or unacceptable level of English for communication between pilots and ATCOs according to the ICAO scales. The speech samples can also help in ensuring consistency and standardisation in rater training and practice.

Workshop Sessions

In the afternoons the conference participants were divided into four groups and led by the moderators (Elizabeth Mathews, Norma Bravo, Ana Lucia Monteiro, Patricia Tosqui, and Beatriz Aragao, assisted by Nicole Barrette-Sabourin) who conducted discussion sessions.

Session 1.1: Basic Requirements for Aviation English Teachers The following are the conclusions of the groups. Basic qualifications: SMEs (Subject Matter Experts): Experienced pilot or ATC; rated at level 5 or 6 and the ability to explain things/to teach/to deliver a class. ELEs (English Language Experts): be updated on ICAO documentation; human factors training; should understand the working environment; have experience in teaching adults / in ESP / in developing material; should hold: an international certificate in teaching (e.g. CELTA) + Proficiency Certificate/Degree in the language + Knowledge of the topic (Aviation Industry) + Knowledge of phraseology OBSTACLES: Economic constraints to pay good salaries; general English teaching implies a competition at the moment of hiring teachers. Schools and institutes pay better and more regularly. From the cultural point of

view, ATC and pilots' anxiety to get their rating vs commitment to effective learning. In some cases, teachers of military controllers have a problem to visit the ATC units in order to see what their students' jobs are about. **CHALLENGES:** Not to train students just for the language proficiency exam. Are we teaching English for operators to comply with the regulations? Or are we teaching English for the working position?

Session 1.2: Course Delivery A brainstorming session produced the following comments: ESP should be preferred over General English. Hands-on training: ATCOs and pilots are very practical professionals, so the focus of any training for them must be on application. Training pilots and controllers: a common ground? (little experience with mixed groups) Use of new technologies (simulators, online tools, for example) adds value to course. Teachers must have Aviation background (some knowledge about the area). Team teaching (Language and operational experts) is the ideal combination. More and more use of new technologies (e.g. Skype, Youtube, Team viewer, WIZQ, Second Life, etc.) enable new ways to deliver private, one to one, or group classes for distance or blended learning. Conclusions: The quality of the syllabus and content are more important than course delivery itself. It is important to adapt to student needs and demands, but people have different opinions about whether teaching General English or starting straight with ESP. Opinions vary about the main aim too – should the focus be to prepare students for level 4 or is it not enough? Focus on application, on student needs: English is a tool Teachers and students need to develop technical and cultural skills for efficient e-learning (commitment, discipline, autonomy). Adaptation for schools, trainers, publishers, market (teaching and learning cultural aspects should be taken into account). Awareness for all involved in the process: professional responsibility, safety issues, not just a prep course. Student motivation is a key aspect for course success.

Summary: In the two sessions on Teaching Methods in Day One, participants reflected on their own foreign language learning experiences, in particular examining if we could discern differences between formal learning experiences versus language acquisition experiences. The sentiment in the two sessions on Teaching Methods was that in formal language classes, a communicative, interactive, learner-centred approach was key to successful language learning/acquisition. One participant, a controller, expressed his appreciation for the new methodology being used in Brazil's ICEA: "The [ICEA] Aviation English CPT 10 course was a turning point for me." Others noted that teacher preparation and awareness of operational safety issues was critical for student motivation. In a brief nod to the use of technology, one experienced teacher said that technology mattered less than her ability to provide opportunities for her students to communicate using English.

Reception

ANAC hosted a delicious and abundant reception with Brazilian delicacies and tropical fruit cocktails which was very much appreciated by everyone and prolonged the warm, friendly atmosphere of the day.

Day 2 - Tuesday 13th November

Adrian Enright (ICAEA and original PRICESG member), made a presentation on *The impact of ICAO Document 9835 on the design of language proficiency tests*, which drew largely on his extensive experience in developing Eurocontrol's PELA and ELPAC tests. Significantly, all the points that Adrian made were substantiated by specific references to ICAO Document 9835. His presentation provided the conference with a strong model illustrating the process of test development whereby Doc 9835 was the main point of reference for creating the ELPAC test specifications and ensuring that best practice in test design was followed. ELPAC is so far the only proficiency test fully endorsed by ICAO. Originally developed only for European civil controllers and for Levels 4 and 5, ELPAC now has a Level 6 version of the test. The ELPAC developers are also actively exploring the concept of developing versions for military controllers and pilots. The ELPAC test is today being implemented in States outside of Europe.

Angela Carolina de Moraes Garcia (ANAC) spoke about *Implementing pilot testing in Brazil* and explained the division of authority between pilots (ANAC) and controllers (DECEA). She pointed out how there had recently been a large investment in LPR implementation: since 5th March 2009 all pilot licenses were endorsed and Brazilian requirements, modelled on FAA procedures, were defined in the document RBAC. The Santos-Dumont English Assessment consisted of a warm-up, a problem-solving activity, emergency situations and aviation topics. The test was conducted by an SME (subject matter expert) and an ELE (English language expert) and a 'blind' rater. There were 7 accredited test centres with 12 examiners and 11 ANAC examiners. Of the 9,396 pilots tested, 44% were at Level 4, 22% at level 5, 9% at level 6 and 21% at level 3. In all, 15,000 tests had been delivered.

Beatriz Faria Aragão and **Evandro José Alves** (ICEA) described the situation regarding the assessment of Brazil's 4,000 military controllers in their presentation *Implementing controller testing in Brazil*. 3,000 of the controllers operate in an international environment. 2,000 ATCOs are at Levels 4, 5 and 6. ICEA, in developing their EPLIS test, has benefited from cooperation with Eurocontrol in gaining experience in language proficiency test development. There is a website for candidate familiarisation and a candidate's manual; indeed a considerable effort is made to engage controller candidates in the proficiency process. A purpose-made presentation, *Go 4 It*, has been developed in order to provide controllers with hints about learning English more effectively.

Nicole Barrette-Sabourin (ICAO) made a presentation on *The ICAO Test Endorsement Process – one year on*, which was prefaced by an introduction to ICAO and the LPR process; many teachers and test specialists who have become involved in Aviation English recently are not fully aware of ICAO and where the LPR come from. This clear introduction was much appreciated. Nicole described the ICAO test endorsement process (www.icao-aelte.org): so far 1 test had been fully endorsed, 3 conditionally endorsed and 5 not endorsed. Others were in the process of evaluation. The importance of the pre-evaluation questionnaire was pointed out as a means of knowing whether one's test was ready for evaluation. Nicole admitted the process was a new departure for ICAO and was being enhanced.

Captain Rick Valdes (IFALPA and original PRICESG member) addressed the question *Are we making progress in English language training and testing?* Rick used the example of pilots whose licenses had been endorsed at level 4, but who were patently unable to communicate at Level 4 as an example of how there may easily be a conflict of interest if the same organisation is involved in both training and testing. Using two live recordings of different incidents, Rick brought home the diversity of communication issues that could occur even in an English-speaking environment. He emphasized the responsibility of native speakers to use standard phraseology and speak in a way that was comprehensible to the community as a whole. He demonstrated why it was IFALPA's policy to advocate the use of English only in order to ensure situational awareness. He reminded the conference that everyone involved in operations, training and testing should consider themselves to be a "safety advocate".

Workshop Session 2: Testing

The Day Two workshops working with the ICAO speech samples were useful, informative, and helpful. Adrian Enright gave a brief overview of the Rated Speech Sample Training Aid (RSSTA) project. The conference participants were then divided into four groups (as in Day 1) and under the guidance of the moderators they listened to five speech samples with instructions to rate performance using the ICAO Rating Scale. As an example of immediate feedback it was found that in one group 10 out of 23 had never rated before,

- - 50% of them made their decisions on the final level based on the rating scale,
- - most people said that more language was needed in order to assess the candidate's

- proficiency,
- - most also requested listening more than once (we explained that the more you listen , the "pickier"you are).
 - The results were compiled immediately into a database by ANAC colleagues and participants were able to compare their results with the RSSTA tool and with the fellow participants. The discussions that followed illustrated the need for: consistent adherence to the ICAO Rating Scale when rating, never comparing one candidate to another, "progressive" assessment of language proficiency. We emphasized the importance of collecting evidences of the candidate's language proficiency throughout the test in order to avoid contamination (e.g.: a very fluent candidate with not so good vocabulary),
 - proper training (and refresher training) for examiners, and
 - the value of an interlocutor framework for standardised testing.

Beatriz Aragoa provided the results of our moderation session Day 2 on rating.

Conference closure

Summing up the conference, Philip echoed Nicole Barrette-Sabourin in pointing out just how far the aviation community had come since the ICAO LPRs were issued in March 2003 and that the level of expertise, methodology, good practice, responsibility, and commitment demonstrated by all the speakers, and during the question and answer discussions, was an indication of this progress. A fuller awareness, both at a personal and at an institutional level, was a prerequisite for involving all the stakeholders, for ensuring good practice and avoiding 'box ticking'. As Rick Valdes had said, this indeed was what becoming 'safety advocates' was all about. Part of this awareness was realizing that training and testing were just two sides of the same coin. Our society and our industry tended to focus on metrics, on measurement. It was useful to remind ourselves that ultimately it was praxis, practice, not evaluation, which was the aim of language proficiency. Philip indicated to the conference the huge potential for cooperation which existed in South and Central America. He invited ICAEA's Board members from the region – Norma Bravo (Argentina), Ana Bocorny (Brazil) and Orlando Amaris (Costa Rica) – and all the delegates present to innovate, to build further bridges, in the form of regional seminars and workshops, study and working groups, and joint projects as regards language proficiency not only for pilots and controllers, but in other aviation activities: aircraft maintenance, cabin service, ground support. The delegates had amply demonstrated that there was a very mature level of the requisite expertise. ICAEA would support this in any way it could.

Farewell dinner

In the evening ICAEA hosted a dinner at the *Chocolat Glacé* restaurant, which, despite its name, provided us with a staggering array of mouth-watering gastronomic dishes from the Brazilian North East. On behalf of ICAEA, Adrian and Philip would like to express their warmest thanks to all the members of ANAC staff, the speakers, the moderators, the delegates and the exhibitors who made this conference the exciting, inspiring and relaxed event it was.

Philip Shawcross