

## A report on the ICAEA Forum, Paris - 18<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> April 2013

### Cross-cultural Awareness and Aviation English Training

Just over eighty delegates from 29 different countries in five continents met in Paris on 18th and 19th April in the premises of the DGAC (the French Civil Aviation Authority) to address the theme: *Cross-cultural awareness and Aviation English Training*. It was ICAEA's 15th international forum and brought together a wide range of professions involved in Aviation English: pilots, academics, controllers, regulators, human factors specialists, raters, test service providers, teachers, air navigation service providers. The Europe and North Atlantic ICAO Paris office was also represented.

After a decade during which the association's focus has been very largely on the development and implementation of the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs), a topic which represented a return to the association's wider-ranging interests was most welcome. The aim of the forum was to bring together an academic framework, operational experience and the lessons of practical classroom teaching. However, it also reflected a growing awareness that language proficiency has more aspects and contributing dimensions than had originally been imagined when the LPRs were first drafted in 2003.

In the ten years since 2003 aviation has become ever more a global industry with multi-national and multi-cultural workforces becoming the rule rather than the exception; this component of language proficiency and the use of English as a lingua franca could not be ignored. ICAEA will be pursuing these widening horizons in its next forum to be hosted by Turkish Airlines in Istanbul on 1st and 2nd October this year on the theme: *Onboard Communication: a key to safety and service quality*).

Having held its Annual General Meeting the day before, it was an opportunity to announce the election of our new president, Michael Kay. Michael has a long and distinguished academic career in Aviation English training, research and test development at RMIT in Australia. He is a long-standing member of the association and is now based in Bangkok working for the Thai Air Navigation Service Provider, Aerothai.

#### Day One

Delegates were welcomed to Paris and the DGAC building by Daniel Zimmerman of the DGAC, who had done so much to make this forum possible. The first day's proceedings were chaired by Fiona Robertson, honorary ICAEA president and one of the forum's principal organisers.

The forum opened on Thursday morning with Dr **John O'Regan** from the Institute of Education, University of London, with a *General introduction to cross-cultural issues, theory and practice*. John reminded us about the notions of communicative competence and inter-cultural competence and how Hofstede had identified several dimensions in which cultural variants could be distinguished such as power distance, femininity / masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, individualism / collectivism. Hall had talked about high context cultures where cultural content was implicit and low-context cultures, such as Western societies, where cultural content was explicit.

Critical cultural awareness crossed all competencies; it required tolerance, flexibility, awareness, openness, respect and empathy. As regards language learning, "post method" teaching practice included a respect for regional approaches to language learning.

**Gareth Lloyd Evans**, a Human Factors expert working for Emirates Airlines in the UAE, based his presentation on *Cross-cultural issues in the aviation world* on the multi-cultural experience of the Emirates with its 3,462 pilots coming from 93 nationalities. Gareth pointed out that pilots tend to be very individualistic, are happy with uncertainty but are used to a

fairly strong power distance. There was a certain tension between professional and national cultures, i.e. between Western low power distance and keeping the command structure or being low on uncertainty avoidance versus adhering to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); the professional culture tended to dominate. The need for professional resilience, for instance in recovering from a communication failure, required cultural awareness. The accents with which pilots had most difficulty were Chinese, Indian, Australian, Scottish, Thai and French.

Ana Lucia Monteiro from ANAC, the Brazilian CAA, addressed *Threats to oral comprehension in a multicultural context* based on her research with pilots and controllers in Brazil. Ana Lucia reminded us of the SHEL model and James Reason's Swiss cheese model with specific reference to communication breakdown. An awareness of communication constraints was the last slice of the cheese. Her findings were illustrated by examples of transcribed and recorded comments by Brazilian pilots and controllers on cultural issues. She also demonstrated how Grice's cooperative principle applied to the premises to be found in the ICAO annexes and documents.

A round table discussion with questions and answers on *Cross-cultural questions in various aviation settings* was held. Captain **Veronica Foy**, Training Director of Green Dot Aviation in Vietnam, spoke about the flight deck, **Buntoeng Megchai** an air traffic controller from Aerothai, the Thai air navigation service provider, was in the control room, **Maria Archonti**, Senior Cabin Crew member from Lufthansa German Airlines, referred to the passenger cabin and **Luis Da Cunha Cardoso**, a Station Manager with Openskies Airline, looked at aspects on the ground.

A cycle of four workshops was organised in the afternoon by the four speakers on the round table:

**Veronica Foy** led discussion round the gender issues raised in the video presentation

**Buntoeng Megchai** generated lively discussion by having participants identify how cross-cultural issues contributed to communication breakdowns and their effect on the outcome after playing a recording of a pilot-controller exchange.

**Maria Archonti** introduced the Lufthansa initiative of 'Kultur-raum' offered to cabin crew on flights to Korea and Japan as a practical solution to cross cultural issues.

**Luis Da Cunha Cardo**, who elicited the participants' personal experiences as members of the travelling public and how cultural issues had played a part in their expectations and in the nature of their communication with ground staff. Workshop leaders and speakers answered delegates' questions at the end of the day.

## **DAY TWO**

Day two was chaired by Terence Gerighty, ICAEA Treasurer and Vice President.

The second day's proceedings were initiated by a second presentation by Dr **John O'Regan** on *The state of the art in intercultural competence in language learning*. John referred to the three circles of 'Englishes': the inner circle (the native speakers), the 'outer circle' (second-language English speakers) and the 'expanding circle' (users of English as a lingua franca) and indicated how this phenomena was affecting the way English for specific purposes was conceived of and taught. He pointed out that the notion of a 'community of practice' (Wenger 2006) was a useful one and that aviation was such a community of practice, or even a family of such communities. He suggested that analysing speech acts in terms of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts might well be valuable when analysing communication in aviation as ambiguity crept in as soon as plain language was used.

John's presentation was followed by **Mike O'Donoghue**, head of language training at the ENAC (French National Civil Aviation School) in Toulouse and ICAEA Board member, who spoke about *Teaching aviation English across cultures* based on the school's extensive experience of working with Chinese, Georgian and other students from outside France. He stressed that the communicative approach to language teaching was only one approach among many, but that the Language Proficiency Requirements and ICAO Document 9835 had been based on this model. Mike used the concept of a 'safety envelope' and pointed out that ICAO Level 6 was not within the safety envelope, but that intercultural competence was an integral part.

**Valerie Wilson** used her experience working with air traffic controllers handling Chinese cadet pilots on Montpellier airport in the South of France to address the subject of *Creating a learning environment conducive to developing intercultural*.

Dr **Anna Borowska** of the University of Warsaw, Poland, spoke about *Shaping cross-cultural awareness in aviation English communication*.

**Karen Mak**, Head of Aviation Communication at Hong Kong Airlines and an ICAEA Board member, brought her considerable experience of working in a multi-cultural environment to provide us with another deeply thought-out perspective in *The East Asian influence*.

The morning was completed by a round-table discussion chaired by Gareth Lloyd Evans and short presentations

**Timothy O'Shea** of the ENAC, France.

**Norma Bravo** of the Argentina ANAC and an ICAEA Vice President.

**Mladin Zunic** of Green Dot Aviation, Vietnam.

**Iryna Zarubinska**, Vice-Rector of the National Aviation University, Kiev, Ukraine, who stood in for Sergey Melnichenko at the last minute.

After lunch, Timothy O'Shea, Norma Bravo, Mike O'Donoghue, Veronica Foy and Mladin Zunic ran breakout sessions designed to help develop intercultural awareness.

**Michael Kay**, the ICAEA President, brought the day's activities to a close with a short presentation of materials used with controllers in Thailand.

In the discussion and question and answer session with which the forum concluded mention was made of the glaring need for native English speakers to make their language more accessible to non-native, Level 4 speakers in an aviation context. Intercultural awareness was still sadly lacking.

Many of the delegates met in the evening for a typical Breton meal of savoury buckwheat *galettes (pancakes)*, sweet *crêpes* and cider. The donation box placed on the free second-hand aviation book table contained €125 which has been sent to Handicap International. Thank you for your contributions. 38 people replied to the survey.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the success of the event. In particular Daniel Zuckerman, our man at the DGAC, and his team. Tim Batten, Gaetan Boutry and Xavier Wirth and a specially warm thanks to Maryse Lartigue. We are grateful to the DGAC for receiving us in their very well equipped premises, and for two stupendous coffee breaks.

But most of all we wish to thank the speakers and participants – we only provided the structure, it was you who made the event worthwhile and memorable.

