

Aviation English Comes of Age

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Development of air-ground communication

If we are to feel that there has been a coming of age, we have to know what has gone before. To avoid conducting a history lesson of the development of air-to-ground communications in civil aviation, a short quiz was used. (see Quiz 1)

The final question of this quiz was "What does LPR mean?" Language Proficiency Requirements. The importance of the introduction of LPR cannot be underestimated. The end-users of ground to air communications in English will forever be indebted to ICAO and the PRICESG for this landmark in aviation English history. This finally lays to rest the false assumption that RT phraseology is so restricted in linguistic scope that the rest of English is not really necessary.

Language training development

While ground to air communication has been developing, so of course has the general language training process. This has moved from the grammar-translation approach through many different phases, the audio-lingual, audio-visual, structural, notional-functional, communicative, task based, lexical, ESP (English for Special Purposes) and needs analyses. The modern language teacher has a whole panoply of methodologies to choose from, many of which spring from advances in applied linguistics.

Technical progress

Technical progress has meant much more variety of choice in delivery of training, as tape-recorders, language laboratories and video machines have developed into multi-media labs, PC's and interactive whiteboards.

This has allowed teaching to, in effect, leave the classroom with distance learning by computer. But such a hi-tech solution may not be appropriate for all circumstances. There is certainly still a need for the low-tech course, and the face-to-face lesson.

Textbooks and materials

There has been a huge development in general English, into a veritable publishing industry for ELT (English Language Training). From a very few titles on the shelves in the 1960's, there are now large fat catalogues of materials of all kinds.

Aviation English has followed only very slowly. The market is so specialised. But surely the days are past when the aviation English teacher had to go out armed with a tape recorder and make their own listening materials. There is just so much more available today, both published expressly for English training, or materials available on line or on radio that can easily be downloaded. In this way, today's aviation English teacher can concentrate on the teaching and learning process in his or her classes without worrying where the materials are coming from for the next lesson. Thank goodness for that – how complex is the job of writing for self-access materials and distance learning.

Along with the development of aviation English teaching, there has also been the **development of ICAEA** – the International Civil Aviation English Association. A very rapid overview was conducted on that topic to bring everyone up to date on the various activities that have taken place down through the years.(see Quiz 2)

The wider view

Aviation English is not just radiotelephony phraseology and plain English as used by pilots and controllers. There are many other users of English in the aviation sphere, ground staff of all kinds – engineers, coordinators, maintenance crew, front of house staff, cabin crew, airport staff, airline staff, civil aviation authority staff etc etc. the list is much longer. It is to be hoped that improvements in standards for pilots and controllers will lead to similar efforts for other aviation professions

Global context of aviation English

We must consider the wider context in which we wish to conduct this drive for better English standards. This is a hard-pressed industry. There is increasing competition from low-cost companies, and a consequent reduction of profit margins. There is also fast expansion in civil aviation in India,

China and Russia. Africa is poised to become a giant tourist destination, and South America too is ready for air travel expansion. This will in turn bring competition for qualified personnel. And fuel costs will inevitably rise. There is also the small problem of CO2 emissions which will surely be taxed in the foreseeable future.

So having English language proficiency regulations in place is only half the battle. They will have to be enforced. Budgets for improved training will have to be found.

The future of aviation English standards for pilots and controllers can only be assured if the ICAO English proficiency regulations are effectively applied. In order to achieve and maintain the required level of English there has to be:

- Relevant and well-designed materials
- Competent, well-trained and qualified teachers
- Appropriately planned and delivered courses

Having attended this Forum, it is reassuring to see how many choices in these three above areas now exist.

But in addition to these a testing accreditation system, instigated by ICAO has to be put in place and that is why I hope the petition which was signed in Cambridge addressed to ICAO will be effective. (see petition to ICAO)

ICAEA would seem to be a natural home among aviation English professionals for hosting serious deliberation of the accreditation issue and this is the subject which will probably be one of the themes in our next meeting.

Quiz 1: English RT Quiz

1. Pre - 1926 American airlines tried using bonfires of hay lit by farmers at regular intervals for air navigation - True or false?
2. Pre-1946 a pilot flying from London to Milan had to speak English, French and Italian - True or false?
3. How many cockpit crew members were there on the larger commercial carriers before the mid-50's/early 60's and what were their functions?
4. QFE and QNH are remnants of the old Q code. What was the Q code?
5. Who, or what was Roger?
6. When was today's "phonetic" alphabet implemented?
7. When was ICAO formed?
8. Where are ICAO headquarters?
9. What prompted a complete revision of English RT phraseology at the beginning of the '80s?
10. What two words at taxi and take-off phase were given particular attention in the new phraseology and why?
11. Which English number has a homonym which causes problems in routine RT instructions despite increased efforts in phraseologies to avoid such problems?
12. Before 1983 half the world was using "pull-up" and the other "go-around" for the missed approach instruction. How did the ICAO RT committee decide which to implement in the 1983 phraseology recommendations, and which one did they choose?
13. Why did CAA UK later decide to change this?
14. What's the origin of "Mayday" and why?
15. What is Doc 9835 ?
16. Where can you get it?
17. What is CAP 413?
18. What does PRICESG stand for?
19. What is an LPR?

RT QUIZ Answers

1. Pre - 1926 American airlines tried using bonfires of hay lit by farmers at regular intervals for air navigation (*true it was abandoned in favour of rotating light beacons*)
2. Pre-1946 a pilot flying from London to Milan had to speak English, French and Italian – *incredible but true*

3. How many cockpit crew members were there on the larger commercial carriers before the mid-50's and what were their functions?

(at least) Captain, Co-pilot, Flight Engineer, Radio operator

5. QFE and QNH are remnants of the old Q code. What was the Q code?

– a list of 3 letter codes all starting with Q that was used for morse transmissions in radio telegraphy. The Q code with 45 items was first drawn up in 1912

6. Who, or what was Roger? *The letter R was Roger in the old 1947 ICAO alphabet*

A-Abel; B-Baker; C-Charley; D-Dog; E-Easy;

F-Fox; G-George; H-How; I-Item; J-Jig; K-King;

L-Love; M-Mike; N-Nan; O-Oboe; P-Peter; Q-Queen;

R-Roger (!); S-Sugar; T-Tare; U-Uncle; V-Victor;

W-William; X-X-Ray; Y-Yoke; Z-Zebra.

7. When was today's "phonetic" alphabet implemented? *1954*

A-Alfa; B-Bravo, C-Charley; D-Delta; E-Echo; F-Foxtrot;

G-Golf; H-Hotel; I-India; J-Juliet; K-Kilo; L-Lima; M-Mike; N-November; O-Oscar;

P-Pap-pa; Q-Quebec; R-Romeo; S-Sierra; T-Tango; U-Uniform; V-Victor; W-Whiskey;

X-X-Ray; Y-Yankee; Z-Zulu

8. When was ICAO formed? *1947*

9. Where are ICAO headquarters? *Montreal*

10. What prompted a complete revision of English RT phraseology at the beginning of the '80s?

The Tenerife crash in 1977

11. What two words at taxi and take-off phase were given particular attention in the new phraseology and why?

"cleared" and "take-off" were at the centre of the misunderstandings that caused the crash.

"cleared" was replaced by "approved" and "take-off" by "departure" for all instructions on the ground except actual take-off clearance.

12. Which English number has a homonym which causes problems in routine RT instructions despite increased efforts in phraseologies to avoid such problems? *Two sounds the same as to – climb/ing two/to??? seven zero*

13. Before 1983 half the world was using "pull up" and the other "go around" for the missed approach instruction. How did the ICAO RT committee decide which to implement in the 1983 phraseology recommendations, and which one did they choose? *They put it to a majority vote and "go around" won.*

14. Why did CAA UK later decide to change this? *There was very nearly a mid-air collision because an a/c on final was instructed to "go around" and started to do a 360° turn.*

15. What's the origin of "Mayday" and why? *It comes from French "m'aider" (or m'aidez) because French was the original language of radio-telegraphy*

16. What is Doc 9835? *Manual on the Implementation of ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements*

17. Where can you get it? *Instructions for buying it are on ICAO website.*
18. What is CAP 413? *The CAA UK manual of radiotelephony phraseology*
19. What does PRICESG stand for? – *Proficiency Requirements in Competence in English Study Group*
20. What is an LPR? *Language Proficiency Requirement*

Quiz 2: ICAEA Quiz

1. The first aviation English Forum took place in (circle the correct answer)
1978, 1984, 1994, 1999
2. It took place in:
Toulouse, Paris Charles de Gaulle, Paris Orly, Bournemouth England
3. In which three of the following places has there NOT been an ICAEA Forum or Seminar (circle three):
Warsaw, Helsinki, Paris, Glasgow, Stockholm, Riga, Vilnius, Bournemouth, Prague, Besancon, Toulouse, Dublin
4. What's the difference between an ICAEA Forum and an ICAEA Seminar?
5. What was the original name of ICAEA?
6. Why was it changed?

For those who have been following ICAEA's activities for some time, and those who have studied the website (www.ICAEA.pata.pl) closely:

Match the places and dates with the seminar titles.

Hint: the topics were chosen to coincide with the a centre of interest of the host organisations

1. *Cockpit Resource Management*
2. *English Requirements and Technical Training*
3. *Simplified English*
4. *Recurrent Training in English for Radiotelephony*
5. *Testing of English for Pilots and Controllers*
6. *Initial Training in English for Radiotelephony*
7. *Lexicography and Teaching Aviation English Terminology*
8. *Radiotelephony*
9. *The effects of the conclusions of ICAO's Proficiency Requirements in Common English Study Group*

Prague , Czech Republic, May 1993, hosted by CSA Airlines	
Helsinki , Finland, June 1993, hosted by Finnair	
Bournemouth , UK, October 1993 hosted by CAA (UK) and the Anglo-Continental Educational Group	
Warsaw , Poland, September 1994 hosted by Polish Airports State Enterprise and the Polish Air Traffic Agency	
Toulouse , France, February 1995 hosted by Airbus Industrie	
Luxemburg , May 1996 hosted by Eurocontrol	
Riga , Latvia, September 1996 hosted by Latvian State Enterprise of Air Space Utilization and Air Traffic Organization	
Warsaw , Poland, September 2002 hosted by the Polish Airports States Enterprise and Polish Air Traffic Agency	
Luxemburg , September 2003 Hosted by Eurocontrol	

ANSWERS

1. The first aviation English Forum took place in (circle the correct answer)
1978, **1984**, 1994, 1999

2. It took place in:

Toulouse, Paris Charles de Gaulle, **Paris Orly**, Bournemouth England

3. In which three of the following places has there NOT been an ICAEA Forum or Seminar (circle three):

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4. What's the difference between an ICAEA Forum and an ICAEA Seminar?

A Seminar is all conducted in plenary form and concentrates on a single topic.

A Forum has both plenary sessions and parallel workshops and therefore tends to have a wider theme.

5. What was the original name of ICAEA? International Aviation English Association

6. Why was it changed? Because the acronym (IAEA) also meant the International Atomic Energy Agency and this body, which was not very well-known when ICAEA started, became almost a household name during the run-up to the Iraq war.

Prague , Czech Republic, May 1993, hosted by CSA Airlines	<i>2 English Requirements and Technical Training</i>
Helsinki , Finland, June 1993, hosted by Finnair	3 <i>Simplified English</i>
Bournemouth , UK, October 1993 hosted by CAA (UK) and the Anglo-Continental Educational Group	8 <i>Radiotelephony</i>
Warsaw , Poland, September 1994 hosted by Polish Airports State Enterprise and the Polish Air Traffic Agency	<i>7 Lexicography and Teaching Aviation English Terminology</i>
Toulouse , France, February 1995 hosted by Airbus Industrie	<i>10. Cockpit Resource Management</i>
Luxemburg , May 1996 hosted by Eurocontrol	<i>4 Recurrent Training in English for Radiotelephony</i>
Riga , Latvia, September 1996 hosted by Latvian State Enterprise of Air Space Utilization and Air Traffic Organization	<i>6 Initial Training in English for Radiotelephony</i>
Warsaw , Poland, September 2002 hosted by the Polish Airports States Enterprise and Polish Air Traffic Agency	<i>9 The effects of the conclusions of ICAO's Proficiency Requirements in Common English Study Group</i>
Luxemburg , September 2003 Hosted by Eurocontrol	<i>5 Testing of English for Pilots and Controllers</i>

PETITION

September 1st 2007

To:

International Civil Aviation Organization

From: ICAEA

Re: Petition in support of ICAO establishing an Aviation Language Testing Accreditation Program

The new ICAO English language proficiency requirements, which will take effect from March 2008, are a landmark in the ongoing development of safe radio communications in aviation worldwide. They are a credit to all those who worked on their creation and to ICAO as the regulatory body. Furthermore, since 2003, ICAO has supported the States and the industry in their implementation by a series of significant steps among which are two Aviation Language Symposia, the publication and revision of Doc. 9835, several regional seminars and the creation of the ICAO LPR Speech Samples training aid.

Clearly, proficiency or licensing testing is the cornerstone of a successful implementation of the requirements. However, because aviation language testing is still an unregulated activity, national authorities, ANSPs and carriers have no guidelines or criteria by which to assess the validity and reliability of the testing systems upon which they must construct their LPR implementation processes. Without the impartial guidance provided by a rigorous accreditation system, based on both operational and linguistic principles, the industry will face significant safety and economic threats in its attempt to measure proficiency in Aviation English. Alone ICAO has the authority to conduct such an initiative under its auspices.

The International Civil Aviation English Association, whose principal objective is to enhance the quality and standard of English in Aviation, wishes to submit this petition signed by members of the aviation English professional community, calling for ICAO to create a system of accreditation for English language tests designed to evaluate Aviation English language proficiency as delineated in the requirements.

ICAEA members worldwide stand ready to support such an ICAO initiative in any way possible.

Signed:

ICAEA Officers

Fiona Robertson, President _____

Elizabeth Mathews, Vice-President _____

Philip Shawcross, Vice-President _____

Bozena Slawinska, Vice-President _____

(followed by signatures of participants)