AVIATION LANGUAGE TRAINING: A SUMMARY OF BEST PRACTICE

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The adoption of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices pertaining to the use of language for aeronautical radiotelephony communications represents a significant step forward towards improving aviation communication safety. Still required is the development of the infrastructure necessary to support the ICAO Standard.

Required are tests, qualified aviation instructors, adequate and high quality aviation English training programs, teacher-training programs, and—as a foundation to the total infrastructure—we require much good quality, relevant, aviation English learning and teaching materials.

It is useful to understand the circumstances into which the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements have been introduced, in the context of English language testing and training. Without an ICAO Standard clarifying the level of proficiency required, it has been difficult for the industry to invest in English language training. As a result, the ICAO SARPs concerning Language Proficiency Requirements introduce a need for much *more* high-quality and aviation-specific language training materials and programmers than what is currently available and call for the development of academically sound, high-quality aviation-appropriate language testing services.

Complicating the development of materials and programs to enable States to comply with the ICAO language requirements are a number of factors. There is urgency to the need for materials, trainers, and programs because of the time constraint of the 2008 testing requirements, necessarily imposed upon the process by the ICAO Chicago Convention. Coupled with the fact that language learning takes a significant amount of time and effort are a number of layperson misconceptions about language teaching and language learning. Contrary to some popular belief, in which language teaching is misunderstood as something that "anybody who speaks English can teach," language teaching is a specialized professional activity, requiring academic training in linguistics, language learner theories, language teaching methodologies, and more. Language teaching is further distinguished from other teaching activities because of the unique nature of language learning. It is a complex blend of skill, knowledge and cultural awareness, combining physical components with mental, communicative, and social processes.

While there is widespread agreement within the academic community on the professional requirements of language teaching, further complicating the development of effective and efficient aviation language training programs is the fact that the language teaching and testing industry is by and large an unregulated industry. No license is required in order for someone to call themselves 'language teacher."

As a result, there is wide variety in program and instructor quality. The ICAO Guidance Manual presents a chart outlining appropriate teaching qualifications as one guide to pointing the aviation industry in an appropriate direction as it moves to meet the inevitable training and testing challenges accompanying the introduction of new language proficiency requirements.

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