

The Association of Language Raters

Purpose

The Association of Language Raters is a non profit-making organisation established for the purpose of maintaining global standards in the assessment of the English language proficiency of aviation operations personnel. It is an association of both aviation and language professionals committed to the pursuit of professionalism and fair play in the delivery of English language testing for Aviation.

Background: ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements and language assessment.

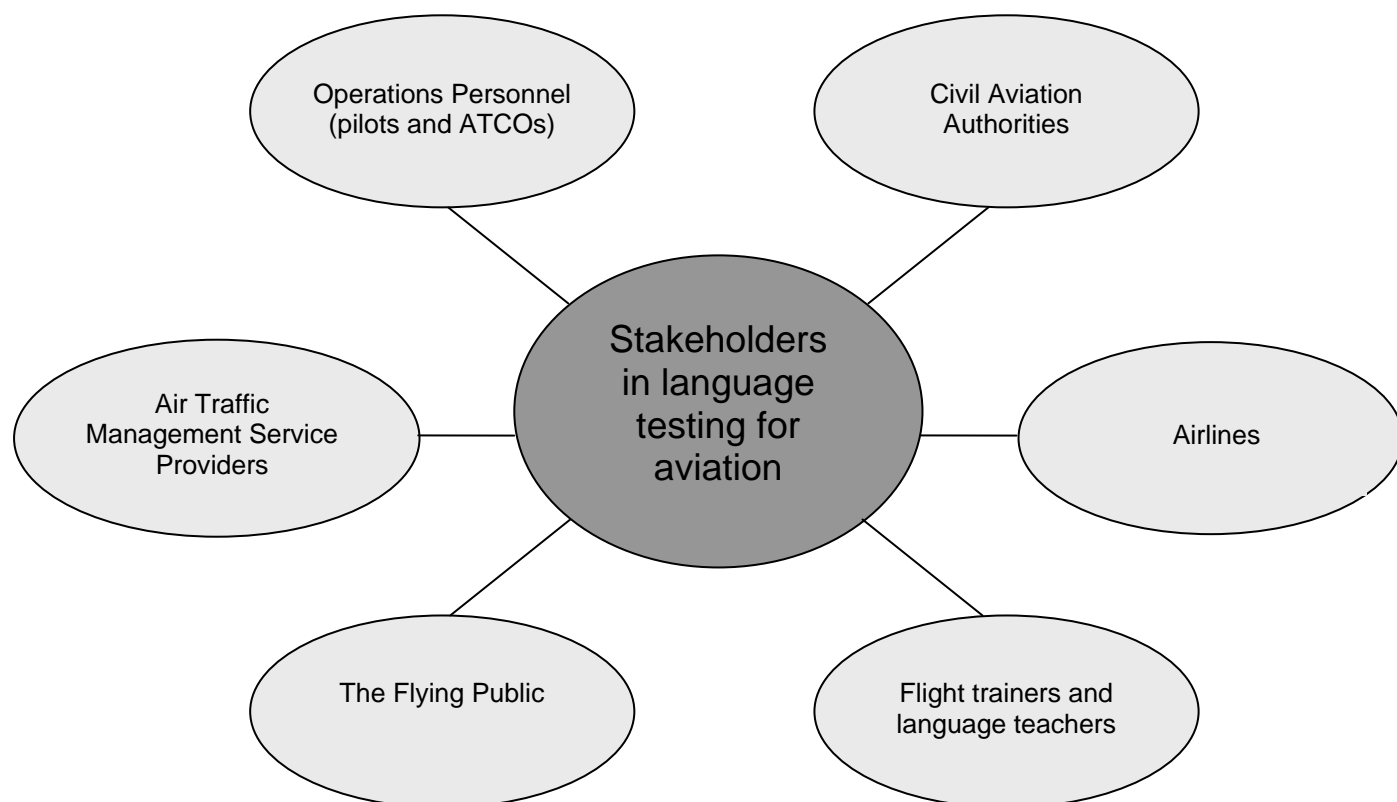
In response to a growing need to effective and safe communication between pilots flying internationally and air traffic controllers managing international traffic, a minimum level of English language proficiency will be required by March 5th, 2008. ICAO Document 9834, entitled *Manual on the Implementation of Language Proficiency Requirements*, contains the language assessment criteria in the *Rating Scale* and the *Holistic Descriptors*). These assessment criteria describe the elements of language proficiency for aviation across six language skill profiles: *Pronunciation, Structure, Vocabulary, Fluency, Comprehension, Interactions*. Proficiency is divided into six levels from pre-elementary (level one) to expert (level six). Pilots and air traffic controllers are required to reach a minimum of Operational level four in each language profile by March 5th 2008 for licensing purposes.

These criteria are the standard by which the language proficiency of every pilot and air traffic controller in the world will be assessed. Every testing programme and test instrument developed to measure English language proficiency of aviation operations personnel will be based upon the *Rating Scale* and *Holistic Descriptors* in every ICAO member state.

For the timely and effective implementation of the ICAO language proficiency requirements, it is essential that a global standard for language proficiency is established. The levels of proficiency described in the *Rating Scale* and *Holistic Descriptors* need to be applied to the actual language use of aviation operations personnel in the same way in order to ensure a standard for clear and safe communication in the skies. Uniformity in what is considered 'Operational' features of pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and interactions needs to be established according to a standardised interpretation of the *Rating Scale* and *Holistic Descriptors*, regardless of what testing instruments are employed and in what member state language testing is conducted.

In such a 'high-stakes' environment, language testing needs to be accountable to the test-taking community and to the stakeholders in the aviation industry (see Figure 1). Civil Aviation Authorities, managers of airline and air traffic management service providers, trainers, pilots and controllers, and ultimately, the flying public, need to be able to trust global language assessments and to have confidence that licensed operations personnel are competent communicators in the English language. It is the responsibility of language testers around the world to provide test results which are valid, consistent and reliable, and in line with a global standard.

Figure 1: Stakeholders in language testing for aviation



It is the goal of ALR to minimise variation and discrepancy in the interpretation of the *Rating Scale* and *Holistic Descriptors*, and to set and maintain the standard for the application of the criteria in the assessment of English language proficiency in aviation.

The Role of the Language Rater

The role of the language rater is crucial to the effective implementation of the language proficiency requirements. Every test instrument designed to assess language proficiency in aviation will require a language rater to make formal judgements of a candidate's speech by applying the *ICAO Rating Scale and Holistic Descriptors*.

The way in which a language rater works may vary from test to test. A language rater may:

- Be an examiner, and conduct the rating process at the same time as delivering an oral proficiency test.
- Rate live speech independently, working with an examiner or interlocutor during a proficiency test.
- Rate recorded speech samples after tests have been conducted.

It is the responsibility of the rater to make accurate judgements as to proficiency across the six language skill areas in every testing situation. In producing reliable test results within a testing system, and for global cross-test reliability and comparability, it is essential that the interpretation of the assessment criteria and the procedure for rating speech samples is standardised.

Immediate Activity

At present, rating oral proficiency using the *ICAO Rating Scale and Holistic Descriptors* is an unregulated area of activity.

The Association of Language Raters seeks to provide an internationally-recognised Language Rater Accreditation Service (LRAS). The service will:

- Provide a global assessment procedure for the accreditation of language raters.
- Provide guidance to language raters, in collaboration with ICAO, on the standard procedure for rating the language proficiency of aviation operations personnel and establish standards in the interpretation of the *ICAO Rating Scale and Holistic Descriptors*
- Establish minimum standards for the professional qualifications and experience of language raters.
- Establish a minimum level of language proficiency for non-native speaking language raters.

The Association of Language Raters aims to establish an operational Language Rater Accreditation Service by March 5th 2008.

Establishment of the Association of Language Raters and the Language Rater Accreditation Service

Phase 1: Consultation and funding – 12 months

1. Seek formal support from ICAO.
2. Seek formal support from contracting states.
3. Seek support from academic organisations, such as ICAEA.
4. Approach civil aviation authorities, airlines and air-traffic management service providers for financial support and funding.
5. Invite operational and academic professionals to act as regional representatives of ALR. Invite input on the structure, organisation and activities of ALR.
6. Formally and legally establish the Association of Language Raters.
7. Invite language raters in individual ICAO member states to act as Team Leaders.
8. Seek membership of The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) and the International Language Testing Association (ILTA).

Phase 2: Establishing the Language Rater Accreditation Service (LRAS) (3 Months)

1. A minimum of 30 speech samples are gathered from organisations around the world who are involved with testing English language proficiency for aviation. Speech samples are from both pilots and ATCOs.
2. Regional ALR representatives convene in an agreed location for a three-day conference. The agenda for the conference is as follows:
 - Rate the gathered speech samples in groups, and write rationales for the ratings.
 - Organise the rated speech samples into 'assessment packs'.
 - Establish assessment criteria for rater accreditation.
 - Produce 'Code of Practice' documents for signing by ALR Representatives and Team Leaders
 - Formalise guidance material for language raters on the standard procedure for rating the language proficiency of aviation operations personnel.
 - Formalise the minimum standards for professional qualifications and experience and language proficiency levels of non-native speaking raters.
3. Distribute the 'assessment packs' to Team Leaders in member states.

Phase 3: Implementing the Language Rater Accreditation Service (ongoing)

1. A language rater applies to the Association of Language Raters for Rater Accreditation and pays an accreditation fee.
2. The Association considers the application, and authorises the Team Leader to make an assessment pack available to the rater.
3. The rater rates 10 speech samples under examination conditions and under the supervision of the Team Leader.
4. The team leader returns the ratings to the ALR administration for assessment.
5. If the rater has adequately demonstrated an ability to rate speech samples according to the assessment criteria standard set by the Association, an official certificate of accreditation is sent to the language rater.



Notes on Rater Accreditation:

A rater will be required to rate 10 speech samples, achieving the same overall ICAO level on no less than 8 of the 10 samples.

The rater must rate a sample with a discrepancy of no more than one level in each of the six language profiles provided that the discrepancy doesn't affect the overall ICAO level.

Accreditation certificates are valid for two years. On expiry, the rater must re-apply for ALR accreditation.

A rater must have ALR accreditation in order to rate the language proficiency of pilots and controllers for licensing purposes.

Medium Term Activity

Maintaining LRAS:

Regional ALR representatives convene at an agreed location for a bi-annual conference. The agenda for the conference is as follows:

1. Rate a set of speech samples and write rationales in order to produce 'assessment packs' for the new accreditation period.
2. Review existing policy for rater accreditation.
3. Review rater feedback gathered by Team Leaders.
4. Produce a bi-annual report for ICAO Produce a published bi-annual report for ALR funding organisations and the international rating community

Long Term Activity

Following the successful implementation of the LRAS, the Association of Language Raters could work to a broader remit including the following areas:

- Language Test Accreditation
- Language Training Accreditation
- Inspection and auditing of language training and testing organisations
- Training programs
- Regional seminars
- Consultation to the industry