



## Abstract for poster presentation, Language Testing Research Colloquium 2010

### Developing an English language proficiency test for pilots

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Oxford Aviation Academy is the largest independent provider of flight training and aviation crew resourcing in the world. The introduction of the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements in 2003 created a new demand from the airline industry for aviation English language education and assessment services which OAA was uniquely positioned to serve. Emery-roberts (ER), an aviation English consultancy, began working in partnership with OAA in 2007, supporting OAA with the provision of such services.

In August 2008, Oxford Aviation Academy (OAA) and emery-roberts (ER) began an English language proficiency test development project for two reasons:

- There was clearly a market demand for a high quality English language test for pilots; and
- Both parties doubted the commercial viability of acting as a 3rd party provider of the very few tests available with documented evidence of test quality.

A test development team was formed comprised of 3 subject matter experts (SMEs) at OAA (flight instructors and examiners) and 3 English Language Experts (ELEs) at ER (teachers and authors of English language training materials for aviation professionals with experience of language testing). Based on ICAO guidance documentation, needs analysis, experience, and literature from the field of language testing, the team established the following broad test specifications:

The test shall:

- measure English language proficiency for VFR and IFR radiotelephony communications;
- assesses the skills of listening comprehension and speaking only;
- measure proficiency in plain English in an aviation context;
- include, but not overtly measure, standard ICAO phraseology;
- be designed for pilots operating aircraft on international flights;
- measure language proficiency according to the ICAO rating scale and holistic descriptors at levels 3 to 5;
- not be linked to and can be used independently of a particular course of study.

In the development of task specifications and preliminary task trials, and development of administration and assessment procedures, the team employed the services of a UK based language testing expert familiar with the aviation language testing context.

At the time of writing, the test is due to be trialled at the OAA Type Rating Training Organisation at London Gatwick airport. The trials will be conducted on a number of professional pilots from a range of first language backgrounds, and video recorded. The resulting performances will be rated by a team of 8 examiners who are both SMEs and ELEs. The data generated from these trials will be subject to a Many Facet Rasch Analysis to investigate how the test tasks are performing and the extent of rater agreement.