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Language problem in aviation

English is considered as the major world language in all spheres, including aviation. We have analyzed the levels of English knowledge over the world and made conclusions about the necessity of other languages in aviation.

The International Civil Aviation Organization considers six languages as its official: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. Languages and Publications (LP) is responsible for the provision of language services, i.e. interpretation, translation, and editing, and for the production of ICAO documents and publications in all UN official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish) in accordance with the requisite quality standards.

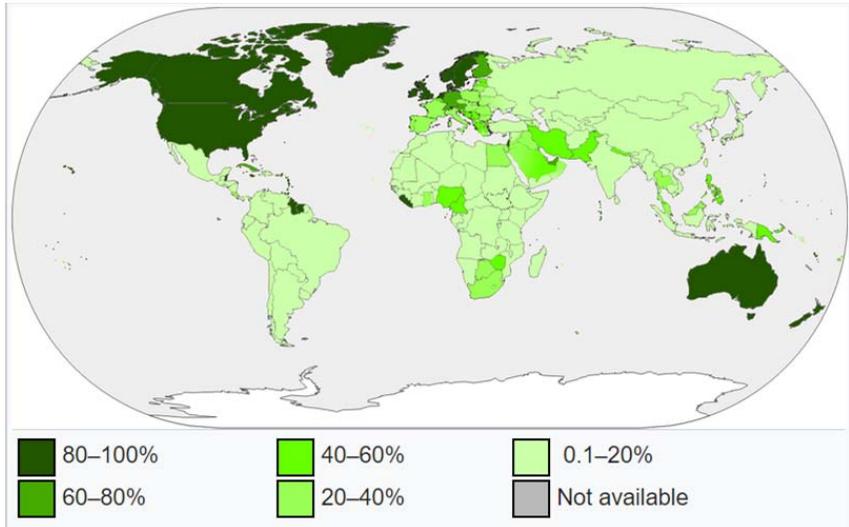
LP's main activities include:

- interpretation and translation in the six ICAO working languages for the Council, its deliberative bodies and the Air Navigation Commission, and for other ICAO meetings held within and away from headquarters;
- editing of publications circulated to member States, often on a simultaneous basis;
- referencing, terminology research, and outsourcing;
- text processing and proofreading.

Thus, the English language is considered as the major aviation language. But, unfortunately, in many countries the percentage of English speakers is quite bad. As for all countries that took participation in last year's poll about English knowledge in non-English speaking countries by EF, Ukraine reached the 47th position with 50.91% of people who speak English. Only eight countries showed very high level of English skills: The Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Singapore, Finland, Luxembourg, and South Africa.

The worst situation with English knowledge is in Latin America, where only Suriname, Guyana and Belize are native English countries, while other countries speak Spanish or Portuguese; in Africa, where only Liberia and Sierra Leone consider English as an official state language and other countries majorly speak French, Arabic and local languages; in Asia, where only the former colony of the United Kingdom – Israel – has very high level of English skills, while others speak Arabic, Russian, Chinese or local languages; and in the Slavic countries of Eastern Europe, including Ukraine.

The solution of the problem with English language in all above mentioned regions is very simple: usage of those ICAO languages, that are the local languages there: French in Africa, Arabic and Chinese in Asia, and Russian in Eastern Europe. Fortunately, the major part of air passengers speaks English quite good, but in some cases the air travellers may not speak even any official ICAO languages.



Picture 1. Percentage of English speakers by country.

So, below is the text of the ICAO Resolution 38/8 about Proficiency in the English language used for radiotelephony communications.

Whereas to prevent accidents, ICAO introduced language provisions to ensure that air traffic personnel and pilots are proficient in conducting and comprehending radiotelephony communications in the English language, including requirements that the English language shall be available on request at all stations on the ground serving designated airports and routes used by international air services.

Recognizing that the language provisions reinforce the requirement to use ICAO standardized phraseology in all situations for which it has been specified.

Recognizing that Member States have made substantial efforts to comply with the language proficiency requirements.

Recognizing that some Member States encounter considerable difficulties in implementing the language proficiency requirements including the establishment of language training and testing capabilities.

Whereas in accordance with Article 38 of the Convention any Member State which finds it impracticable to comply in all respects with any international standard or procedure is obliged to give immediate notification to ICAO.

Whereas in accordance with Article 39 b) of the Convention any person holding a licence not satisfying in full the conditions laid down in the international standard relating to the class of licence or certificate held, shall have endorsed on or attached to the licence all the particulars in which this person does not satisfy such conditions.

Whereas pursuant to Article 40 of the Convention no personnel having certificates or licences so endorsed shall participate in international navigation, except with the permission of the State or States whose territory is entered.

The Assembly:

1. Urges Member States to use ICAO standardized phraseology in all situations for which it has been specified.
2. Directs the Council to continue to support Member States in their implementation of the language proficiency requirements.
3. Encourages Member States to make use of the ICAO Aviation English Language Test Service (AELTS) to verify language testing instruments.
4. Urges Member States to make use of the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements - Rated Speech Samples training aid.
5. Urges Member States to assist each other in their implementation of the language proficiency requirements.
6. Declares that this resolution supersedes Resolution A37-10.

Conclusions

Learning English is the major language task in civil aviation sphere, but other languages certified knowledge would be a great advantage for any aviation employees.

References

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