SOUTH AFRICAN CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY

TECHNICAL GUIDANCE MATERIAL for ICAO Language Proficiency testing

SUBJECT: **TECHNICAL GUIDANCE FOR ICAO LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENTS (LPR) TESTING**

EFFECTIVE DATE: **26 FEBRUARY 2025**

1. APPLICABILITY

1.1. This document is applicable to:

1.1.1. staff associated with South African Aviation Training Organizations and who are involved with, associated with or responsible for testing related to ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements,

1.1.2. SACAA inspectors involved with the surveillance of ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements testing,

1.1.3. SACAA inspectors involved with the surveillance of Aviation Training Organizations and

1.1.4. SACAA Personnel Licensing (PEL) department management.

2. PURPOSE

2.1. The purpose of this document is to:

2.1.1. Standardize LPR test design and operational testing practice,

2.1.2. Provide technical guidance to persons involved with the development and implementation of ICAO Language Proficiency Rating tests,

2.1.3. Expand on the procedures regarding the appointment of Training Organization staff who are responsible for the testing of ICAO Language Proficiency Ratings and

2.1.4. Serve as a refresher guide to SACAA inspectors doing surveillance of ICAO Language Proficiency Rating training and testing at Training Organizations.

3. REFERENCE:

i. Appendix 1.5.1 to Document SA-CATS 61, ICAO ENGLISH PROFICIENCY RATING SCALE
ii. Appendix 1.5.2 to Document SA-CATS 61, ICAO AVIATION ENGLISH QUALIFICATIONS
iii. ICAO Annex 1 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation. Personnel Licensing.
iv. ICAO Doc 9379. Manual of Procedures for Establishment and Management of a State's Personnel Licensing System.
v. ICAO Doc 9432. Manual of Radiotelephony.
vi. ICAO Doc 10197. Test Design Guidelines Handbook on the Design of Tests for the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements
vii. ICAO Circular 323. Guidelines for Aviation English Training Programmes. 2009. ISBN 978-92-9231-403-3.
viii. ICAO dedicated web home page for Language proficiency:

ix. https://www.icao.int/safety/lpr/Pages/Language-Proficiency-Requirements.aspx

4. TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS:

4.1. Terms

TERM	DEFINITION
Accent	A distinctive pronunciation of a language which is usually associated with a geographical region (for first language speakers) or with the phonological influence of another mother tongue (for second or foreign language speakers). All speakers of all languages have an accent.
Descriptor	A brief description accompanying a band on a rating scale, which summarizes the degree of proficiency or type of performance expected of a candidate to achieve that particular score. The band may contain several descriptors.
Dialect	A distinctive variety of a language, usually associated with social or geographical distinctions, which is characterized by differences in accent, vocabulary and grammar with regard to other varieties of the same language.
Language proficiency skills	The knowledge and abilities which impact on the capacity of a given individual to communicate spontaneously, accurately, intelligibly, meaningfully and appropriately in a given language. Note. - Six individual skills are identified in the ICAO Rating Scale.
Plain language	The spontaneous, creative and non-coded use of a given natural language. *Note 1.— Plain language shall be used "only when standardized phraseology cannot serve an intended transmission" (Annex 10, Volume II, 5.1.1.1).*
Rate	To assign a score or mark to a candidate's performance in a test using a subjective assessment.
Rating scale	A scale consisting of several ranked categories used for making judgements of performance. They are typically accompanied by band descriptors which make their interpretation clear

4.2. Abbreviations

ABBREVIATION	DESCRIPTION
AO	Authorised officer
ATC	Air Traffic Controller
ATO	Aviation Training Organization
ATPL	Airline Transport Pilot Licence
CPL	Commercial Pilot Licence
DCA	Director of Civil Aviation
ELP	English Language Proficiency
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organisation
LPR	Language proficiency requirements
N/A	Not applicable
OPI	Oral Proficiency Interview
PEL inspector (ATC)	PEL inspector (Air Traffic Controllers)
PEL inspector (ATO)	PEL inspector (Aviation Training Organization)
PEL inspector (P/FSTD)	PEL inspector (Pilot / Flight Simulation Training Device)

POI	Principal Operations Inspector
PPL	Private Pilot Licence
RPL	Remote Pilot Licence
SACAA	South African Civil Aviation Authority
SME	Subject matter expert
SPL	Student Pilot Licence
TPM	Training and procedures manual
TSO	Testing Standards Officer

5. GENERAL

5.1. Background to the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements

ICAO regards the ability to communicate effectively with spoken language as a crucial safety factor. In this context, "Spoken" refers specifically to listening and speaking (i.e. verbal communication) skills. The ICAO Assembly formulated a resolution (Assembly Resolution A32-16) in 1998. This was done after a series of accidents and incidents where pilots' and air traffic controllers' inability to communicate properly was a large factor.

The background to strengthened ICAO language proficiency requirements is best explained by the organization itself (ICAO Doc 9835, 2010: 1-1):

"Over eight hundred (800) people lost their lives in three major accidents (one collision on the ground, one accident involving fuel exhaustion and one controlled flight into terrain). In each of these seemingly different types of accidents, accident investigators found a common contributing element: insufficient English language proficiency on the part of the flight crew or a controller had played a contributing role in the chain of events leading to the accident. In addition to these high-profile accidents, multiple incidents and near misses are reported annually as a result of language problems, instigating a review of communication procedures and standards worldwide. Such concern was heightened after a 1996 mid-air collision in which 349 passengers and crew members were killed in an accident in which insufficient English language proficiency played a contributing role."

ICAO explains that language use can endanger flight safety in three (3) ways (ICAO Doc 9835, 2010: 1-1):

i. By the incorrect or non-existent use of standardized phraseologies,
ii. By deficiencies in plain language proficiency and
iii. By the combined use of several languages in the same airspace environment.

While ICAO's emphasis in terms of LPR is limited to improving aeronautical radiotelephony communications, an additional interesting, easily overlooked factor is that miscommunication by flight crew members on the flight deck has also played a role in endangering flight safety. ICAO (ICAO Doc 9835, 2010: 1-2) states that:

"By meeting language proficiency requirements, flight crews, especially multi-national flight crews, will have the added safety benefit of better CRM."

5.2. The role of language in aviation

An academic reference book states: *"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world"* (Ferreira, Teaching Language, 2009). This simple phrase sums up the central place that language, thinking and communication assume in our lives. Although ICAO LPR focusses exclusively on aeronautical radiotelephony communications, it acknowledges the complexity of language learning and the broad scope of language in the aviation industry.

Language is complicated, because it is closely linked with our thinking processes and our understanding of subject matter. A Time-Life reference book, titled "How we learn" explains this complexity*: "The ability to speak any language requires an impressive capacity for abstract thought."* (Time-Life International (Nederland) B.V. 1976: 120).

Not only is language in general therefore a complex activity, but in aviation it is intertwined with human linguistical and communication demands, highly specialized technical terminology, standard phraseology, radiotelephony (and the skill of using of radio equipment), prescribed cockpit procedures, airspace operation and air traffic control procedures and complex, abstract cognitive thought processes. These factors and other ones are reasons why an ICAO LPR test has to be designed and planned properly. Fundamentally, all these aspects are related to language use, but an LPR test should not test these elements as such but rather isolate the underlying communication and language proficiency and test this.

6. ICAO LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTING

6.1. Overview

ICAO explains that *"Language proficiency is not merely knowledge of a set of grammar rules, vocabulary and ways of pronouncing sounds. It is a complex interaction of that knowledge with a number of skills and abilities"* (ICAO Doc 9835, 2010: 2-1).

6.1.1. Doc 9835 explains that ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements comprise the following:

a) A set of holistic descriptors and
b) Obtaining at least Operational Level 4 of the ICAO LPR Rating Scale

While five holistic descriptors state the characteristics of proficient speakers and the context for communications, the Rating Scale describes six identified discrete features of language use. "'Holistic" refers to the communicating person as a 'whole,' in contrast to the descriptors in the Rating Scale which instead examine individual, discrete features of language use." (ICAO 9835, 2010: 4-5). The LPR Rating Scale is basically as a guide to good judgement.

ICAO sees the complexity of language proficiency as a hierarchy, as seen in the diagram below (Doc 9835: 2010: 2-10). Each of the blocks refers to one of the discrete language features. More is explained about each feature later.

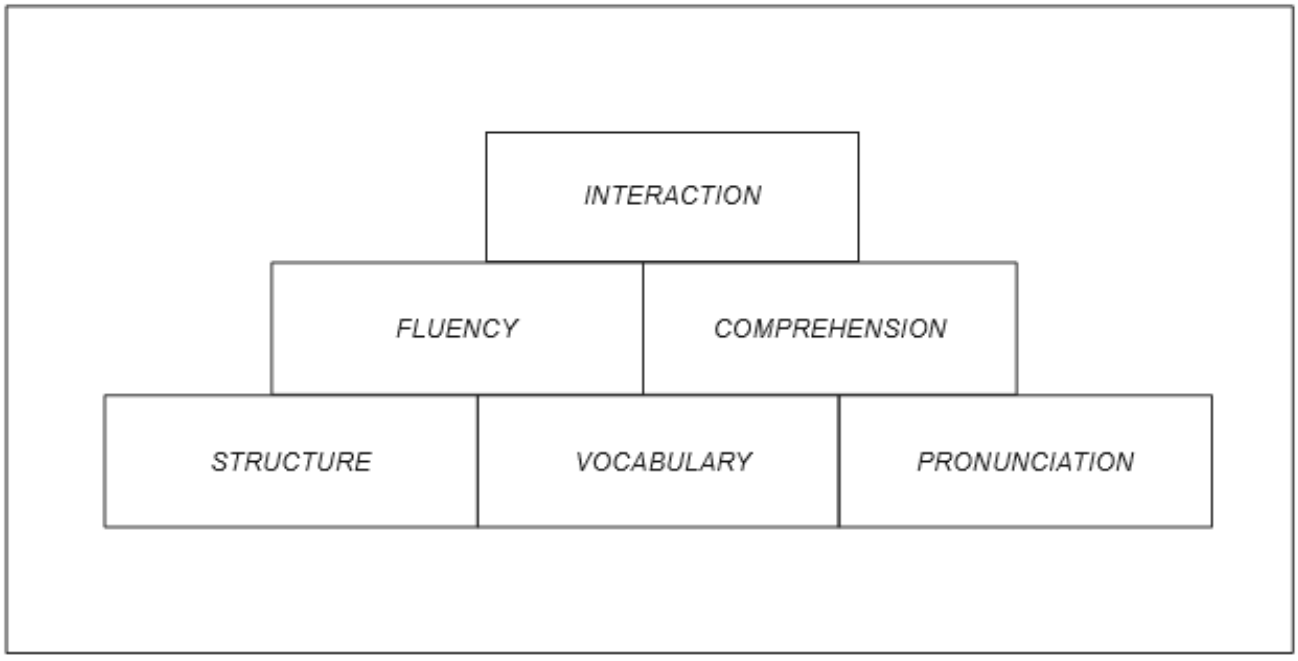

Figure 2-2. A pyramid structure of language proficiency skills

6.2. Aviation language

"The sole object of ICAO language proficiency requirements is aeronautical radiotelephony communications, a specialized subcategory of aviation language corresponding to a limited portion of the language uses of only two aviation professions — controllers and flight crews. It includes ICAO standardized phraseology and the use of plain language. The standardized words and phrases of ICAO phraseology approved for radiotelephony communications have been developed over years and represent a true sub-language as defined above." (ICAO Doc 9835, 2010: 3-2)

6.2.1. What are the characteristics of aviation language? ICAO states that Aeronautical radiotelephony communications:

a) don't rely on reading and writing but require speaking and listening skills.
b) are extremely context-dependent (they depend on specific technical knowledge)
c) relate to aviation matters such as aircraft, navigation, air traffic control procedures and equipment.
d) lack visual and movement input and lean more heavily on clear and accurate speech (normal non-verbal language cues are absent)
e) have a spatial separation of the speakers, resulting in an absence of common points of reference and require a lot more information to be exchanged to establish common ground.
f) allow only one speaker to speak at a time, thereby preventing the use of communication tools remarks or comments that may help to support understanding.
g) often take place in poor acoustic conditions
h) are technically restricted by a narrow bandwidth which can obscure some sounds (like "s" and "f")
i) have interference from background noises (like static interference or from cockpit equipment)
j) are complicated by techniques like Imperfect microphone technique on the part of speakers (like prematurely releasing a PTT switch and in this manner cutting a message short).

As mentioned above, ICAO has subdivided aeronautical radiotelephony language proficiency into two main requirements - satisfying a set of holistic descriptors and achieving at least operational level proficiency on a dedicated rating scale. This is explained below.

6.3. The holistic criteria

The ICAO holistic descriptors are described in ICAO Annex 1 (Personnel Licensing) and ICAO Doc 9835 (Manual on the Implementation of ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements 2010: 4-5 to 4-7).

These holistic descriptors capture the essence of ICAO LPR and could be seen as the "target" or goal of an LPR test. An LPR test must be designed to fully satisfy the holistic criteria. In other words, an LPR test must thoroughly assess whether a candidate is able to achieve the criteria. Only an accurate and intentional test will achieve this.

6.3.1. The holistic criteria are listed below with a short description of each:

a) Proficient speakers shall communicate effectively in voice-only (telephone/radiotelephone) and in face-to-face situations.

Radiotelephony communications lack the facial cues, body language and listening cues found in usual face-to-face situations. Communications without such cues are considered to be more difficult and challenging, requiring a higher degree of language proficiency than face-to-face interactions. In addition, other features of radiotelephony communications make it a unique kind of communicative event. For example, the sound quality may be poor, with distracting sounds and the communicative workload of the air traffic controller or a pilot may be heavy, with a corresponding need for efficiency and brevity. This holistic descriptor draws attention to the need for training and testing to provide voice-only settings to exercise or demonstrate language proficiency, as well as face-to-face settings that allow broader uses of language.

b) Proficient speakers shall communicate on common, concrete and work-related topics with accuracy and clarity.

Context is an important consideration in communications, and an individual's language proficiency may vary in different contexts. This holistic descriptor limits the domain of the communicative requirements to work-related topics; that is, air traffic controllers and pilots are expected to be able to communicate about issues in their field of professional practice. Language proficiency should not be limited to standardized phraseology and should range across a relatively broad area of work-related communicative domains. Appendix B provides a non-exhaustive list of topics and domains appropriate to the work-related requirements of pilot and air traffic controller communications. It is meant as a guide to curriculum development. The assessment of radiotelephony communications should not be limited solely to those topics.

c) Proficient speakers shall use appropriate communicative strategies to exchange messages and to recognize and resolve misunderstandings (e.g. to check, confirm, or clarify information) in a general or work-related context.

Linguists have identified strategic competence as an important part of language proficiency (see Chapter 2, 2.3.2.4, for a definition of strategic competence). One aspect of strategic competence important to air traffic controllers and flight crews is the ability to recognize and resolve potential misunderstandings, e.g. having strategies to check for comprehension in a meaningful way, such as asking for a readback. Equally important is the ability to rephrase or paraphrase a message when it is apparent that a message was not understood. Sometimes the phraseology "Say again" should be understood as a request for clarification rather than repetition. Air traffic controllers and flight crews should understand that silence does not always indicate comprehension. On the part of native-speaking air traffic controllers and flight crews, strategic competence can include an appreciation of the threats presented by cross-cultural communications and a sensitivity to strategies to confirm comprehension.

d) Proficient speakers shall handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine work situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar.

One of the more challenging events in all communications, including those involving the use of a second language, is when the unexpected happens. Human Factors experts have emphasized the threat of letting our expectations hinder our interpretation of reality. Sometimes, a complication or an unexpected event can lead to a communication breakdown. It is important for air traffic controllers and flight crews to have sufficient language proficiency and the strategic skills to manage a dialogue through any unexpected event. It is the nature of the work of controllers and pilots to adhere to strictly defined procedures and regulations and yet to be able, when confronted with a new situation, to demonstrate substantial flexibility in their response. This holistic descriptor emphasizes the need for language skills practised and demonstrated in this context.

e) Proficient speakers shall use a dialect or accent which is intelligible to the aeronautical community.

A first and natural response to this holistic descriptor is to inquire which dialects or accents would be considered intelligible. One answer is to consider how this issue has traditionally been handled among native-speaker controller populations. In the United Kingdom, for instance, a great variety of regional dialects and differences exist. Air traffic control applicants and trainees are informally screened for use of a dialect appropriate to the international aviation context. A determination of what constitutes a strong regional dialect or marked accent is based on the extensive experience and good judgement of the trainer or assessor. When an individual demonstrates a strong regional dialect or marked accent, one determined to be easily understood only by those most familiar with the dialect, that individual is counselled to use a dialect more widely acceptable or is provided with additional elocution or speech training.

7. LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TEST DESIGN

7.1. As a high-stakes test, an LPR test requires accurate and intentional design. As such, it must first and foremost be valid and reliable. These can simply be explained as follows:

a) Validity indicates the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure.

b) Reliability refers to the stability of a test. This requires that a test be consistent in its results.

7.2. In addition, such a test must be practical and implementable.

7.3. An LPR test is really a way to try and see a something that is not openly visible. In Doc 9835 (2010: 2-3) ICAO explains that "All the competences needed for language proficiency are 'constructs' of mental and physical abilities and they are not directly observable… Performance then is not the same as competence but provides the only opportunity by which competence and language proficiency can be inferred and assessed."

7.4. What should not be tested?
An ICAO LPR test is not a hearing test, nor a technical procedural test or a radio operating test. It us ultimately a test of someone's ability to communicate in English in the context of aeronautical radiotelephony. Be careful not to use any mechanism that actually interferes with the core purpose of the test. For example, using an audio clip of an ATC to check for comprehension may be unfair if the controller himself has a strong accent or uses non-standard terminology and jargon which are unknown to the candidate.

7.5. The role of the test is to accurately and thoroughly probe a candidate's competence by virtue of its intelligent design and proper execution. A slapdash, superficial test does not reveal someone's ability. If communication is the name of the game, then to adequately determine whether a candidate is able to communicate effectively requires testing 2-way communication.

7.6. In a nutshell, a candidate must demonstrate the ability to engage in meaningful aviation-specific communication. This means that he or she must understand what is discussed and respond appropriately with insight. It also means that an aeronautical language proficiency test may be an exercise where a candidate recites memorized phrases. An LPR test must be designed to fairly and accurately determine the extent of a candidate's ability in all ICAO-specified domains. This can only be done by including unexpected communication developments or situations in an LPR test. A proficient candidate must be able to accommodate this at the level specified in the ICAO rating scale.

7.7. While the LPR test is not a test of linguistical ability as such, adequate aeronautical radio communication skills rely on discrete linguistical components. A well-designed test assesses these discrete components individually and globally.

7.8. Several important characteristics of an LPR test are summarized below:

a) Test design and construct.

The test should be designed to assess speaking and listening proficiency in accordance with each component of the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale and the holistic descriptors in Annex 1.

The test description must include a clear definition of the test purpose which describes the aims of the test and its target population.

The test description must explain in simple terms why a certain approach to testing was taken. As there are different approaches on how to test proficiency testing in speaking and listening, an understandable description of the test structure and the reason for this structure is necessary.

The test must be contextualized and not focus on so-called discrete-point items, on grammar explicitly or on discrete vocabulary items. Discrete (i.e. indirect) tests do not test language skills directly, but only specific features of underlying language skills, such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. This is not suitable for assessing aviation language proficiency.

A specific listening section with individual items may be included but does not replace the assessment of interaction.

Face-to-face communication is required in some phases of the testing process, but an LPR test must include a component devoting time to voice-only interaction.

The test should be specific to aviation operations. This is important, because ICAO LPRs refer to the ability to speak and understand the language used for radiotelephony communications. It is important that flight crews and air traffic controllers be proficient in the use of plain language used within the context of radiotelephony communications to communicate safely on any operational issue that may arise.

Although phraseology is included in the test (e.g. as a prompt or initiating a simulated radio exchange), the purpose of an LPR test is not to assess standard aeronautical phraseology. The testing of the latter is included in the Restricted and General Radiotelephony tests.

The test should not assess either operational skills or the specific technical knowledge of operations. A language test is fundamentally intended as an operational or technical knowledge test.

The test should have enough built-in flexibility to allow follow-up and “cross-examination” of a candidate in case of uncertainty, misunderstanding or where further clarification is needed.

b) Test validity and reliability

An LPR test should be designed to ensure that it has sufficient validity and reliability. Validity refers to the degree a test measures what it is supposed to measure. Reliability refers to the degree that the test produces consistent and fair results.

refers to the degree that the test produces consistent and fair results.

refers to the degree that the test produces consistent and fair results.

The designers of the specific test should also be listed in the test document.

c) Rating

The rating process should be documented, irrespective of the specific process which the rating team follows. This is because rating is one of the most important steps in language proficiency testing. In South Africa, rating is completed on the day of the test.

The documentation should include instructions on the extent and nature of evidence that raters should collect. This means that raters should be given clear instructions on the kind of evidence they need to collect to justify and support their evaluations.

Documenting scores is insufficient - supporting evidence and support for a score is required. This should include examples of language use by the test-taker that indicate strengths or weaknesses. For example, repeated use of incorrect verb tenses might support a particular structure rating or a problem pronouncing certain sounds might be documented as evidence for a pronunciation score.

LPR test rating is done by a minimum of two raters. A third expert rater should be consulted in the case of divergent scores. This reduces rater error. An aviation language test has two primary raters (a language expert and an operational expert). A third, affiliated, rater who can resolve differences between the two primary raters’ opinions may be used as well.

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d) Test administration and security

The instructions to the test-taker, the test administration team and test raters should be clearly documented. This includes clear instructions for each part of the test process.

cludes clear instructions for each part of the test process.

The equipment, human resources and facilities necessary for the test should be included in the instructions.

The testing venue and room should be comfortable, private and quiet. An LPR test must be conducted in a suitable room with no significant external noise discernible. Intrusions must not be allowed, unless safety or an urgent event matter relating to the candidate or testing personnel dictates otherwise.

A full description of test administration policies and procedures should be available and include at least the following information:

i. policies and procedures for retaking the test,

ii. score reporting procedures,

iii. record-keeping procedures,

iv. how quality control and test maintenance will be done.

e) Test security

Security measures that are in place to protect the confidentiality of the test content should be described and documented. This must include how the question or interview database will be secured from exposure, as this will compromise the test integrity. Test questions and prompts should be regarded as sensitive and treated as such. Test-takers should not be able to prepare for a test beforehand.

8. SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TEST CHARACTERISTICS AND GUIDANCE

Note: The following section explains specific South African requirements for LPR testing.

8.1. Raters and test designers must be familiar with the following publications:

8.1.1. The relevant provisions of ICAO Annex 1, including the holistic descriptors,

8.1.2. The ICAO Rating Scale,

8.1.3. The relevant guidance in ICAO Doc 9835,

8.1.4. The SACAA TGM and test report and

8.1.5. The individual ATO approval and TPM as far as LPR testing is concerned.

8.2. Rater qualifications

a) The rater team consists of two members, one of which is a linguistic expert and the other an operational subject matter expert.

b) The subject matter expert must be either a pilot or an Air Traffic controller. The licence or rating held is not presently dictated by the SACAA, but it is a requirement that the licence-holder is very familiar with a variety of

accents and dialects which may be encountered in international aeronautical radiotelephony. The licence does not have to be valid. Pilots with military experience only are not eligible to act as subject matter experts.

c) The linguistic expert must both hold an academic qualification and have English language teaching experience. Examples of acceptable academic qualifications are:

i. A TEFL, TESL or TESOL certificate,
ii. A formal teaching qualification with experience in English teaching and
iii. A post-graduate qualification in linguistics or linguistic testing.

8.3. Prerequisites for a candidate to be tested

Although an LPR test is not a technical test of operational procedures or standard phraseology, a minimum level of experience of experience and knowledge is necessary for a test to be legitimate.

a) For a pilot, it is therefore strongly recommended that the candidate has been sent for his or her first solo flight.
b) In addition, the candidate must be familiar with the following:

i. The phonetic alphabet.
ii. Using digits to describe altitudes and distances,
iii. The use of callsigns for South African-registered aircraft,
iv. How to address an ATS station (at least ground and tower) and
v. For a pilot, basic communication with other aircraft using radiotelephony

8.4. Structure of an LPR test

A Language Proficiency test must contain the following sequential phases:

a) Phase 1: Introduction

In this phase, the test starts, and the candidate sits at ease. General topics may be discussed briefly, and the candidate's grasp of English may be gauged. Broad discussions should not be prolonged or dragged out unnecessarily because this limits the time available for focused LPR testing. It is important that this part of the test not be allowed to drift or be unfocussed – although discussions may be relaxed or non-technical, questions should still be intentional and purposeful. The raters should elicit responses from the candidate to aid the preliminary evaluation process. The raters should also not allow the introduction to deteriorate into an unprofessional, overly familiar and chatty phase. Raters should already monitor the candidate's use of English for all 6 language features that are assessed in an LPR test. The precise content of this phase is not prescribed, but the discussion should include common, concrete and work-related topics.

b) Phase 2: Technical discussion

This phase should contain a variety of more technical aviation-related topics. Either rater may lead this phase, but the subject matter expert should monitor the responses for evidence of bluffing, regurgitation of memorized phrases or inappropriate or grossly incorrect terminology which might indicate signs of inadequate English language proficiency.

Examples of technical discussion are listening to recorded ATC-pilot exchanges, describing technical procedures or interpreting an aviation scenario from a video, picture or photograph.

The emphasis of this phase should still be to evaluate English proficiency. It is not a dedicated operational or technical test.

c) Phase 3: Simulated radio exchange

In this phase, at least one extended simulated radio exchange is conducted. This operational exchange may be ATC-ATC, ATC-pilot or pilot-pilot and should evaluate a candidate's ability to maintain 2-way radio communication. The exchange may be done with aids (e.g. using an actual radio or other electronic device) or without aid. Irrespective of the method used, this is a critical component of the LPR test, as such an exchange is ultimate proof of a candidate's ability to successfully and effectively use plain English in aeronautical radio communication in the following way (ICAO Doc 9843):

Plain language in aeronautical radiotelephony communications means the spontaneous, creative and non-coded use of a given natural language, although constrained by the functions and topics (aviation and non-aviation) that are required by aeronautical radiotelephony communications, as well as by specific safety-critical requirements for intelligibility, directness, appropriacy, non-ambiguity and concision.

Although standard aeronautical phraseology may be used to start the exchange, it is not to be used to test a candidate's use of standard phraseology. Rather, it should require the candidate to maintain safe and effective 2-way communication in non-routine situations. Like the preceding phases, it should require the candidate to:

Use appropriate communicative strategies to exchange messages and to recognize and resolve misunderstandings (e.g. to check, confirm, or clarify information) and

Handle the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events.

d) Phase 4: Final follow-up (if necessary)

This phase may be used to ask any additional questions to wrap up the test or clarify remaining areas of uncertainty, if necessary.

8.5. Important aspects to consider.

a) Assessing language proficiency in the absence of non-verbal, visual cues to a candidate

In Chapter 6 of Doc 9835 (2010: 6-11), ICAO explains that *"Voice-only interaction is an important characteristic of aeronautical radiotelephony communications; when a pilot and a controller interact, they cannot see each other."*

Furthermore, ICAO also explains *"When two people interact face-to-face, they use non-verbal cues (information other than words) to help them understand each other's messages. People's facial expressions, their body language and the gestures they make with their hands often communicate important information. Aeronautical radiotelephony communications do not benefit from such non-verbal cues; all radiotelephony communications are conveyed through words alone, which can be more difficult to interpret than face-to-face communication."*

-to-face communication."

An LPR test must contain a voice-only section in which the candidate is unable to see the raters. This may be done Using a dividing screen, radio, cellphone or other suitable manner. ICAO suggests using a telephone or headset so that the test-team and candidate cannot see each other.

9. OVERVIEW OF THE ICAO LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY RATING SCALE

9.1. The scope and focus of the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale are specific and unique in several ways:

a) the ICAO Rating Scale addresses only spoken language (speaking and listening); it does not address reading and writing skills.
b) the ICAO Rating Scale has a distinct aeronautical radiotelephony focus; it addresses the use of language in a work-related aviation context, voice-only communications, using strategic competences for safe communications in case of complications or unexpected turn of events, and emphasizing intelligibility in an international community of users and
c) ICAO Operational Level 4 does not target high degrees of grammatical correctness or native-like pronunciation. Grammar, syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation are judged primarily to the extent that they do not interfere with effective oral communication.

9.2. Calculating the final score for a test-taker

When calculating the final score (i.e. rating) achieved, the following aspects are crucial:

a) The final score is not the average or aggregate of the ratings in each of the six ICAO language proficiency skills but the lowest of these six ratings.
b) A person's overall proficiency rating is determined by the lowest rating assigned in any of the language proficiency skills of the rating scale. This is essential because the Operational Level 4 descriptors were developed as the safest minimum proficiency skill level for aeronautical radiotelephony communications. A lower score on any one feature indicates inadequate proficiency; for example, pilots with Operational Level 4 ratings in all areas except pronunciation may not be understood by the air traffic controllers with whom they must communicate. In summary, an individual must demonstrate proficiency at Level 4 in all categories in order to receive a Level 4 rating.
c) It is assumed that a test-taker awarded a particular rating level demonstrates proficiency better than the descriptors contained in each level below. A common point of discussion is how to grade a candidate that achieves a proverbial "half score." It is important to note that failure to comply with descriptors in one category in one level indicates that the next lower proficiency level should be awarded. To use a practical example, a score of 3½ in a language skill (such as Pronunciation or Fluency) should be graded as a "3" and not a "4".

9.3. Considerations when grading a test-taker.

a) Clarity, conciseness and correctness are goals of air traffic control communications. The purpose of standardize phraseology is to reduce the possibility for ambiguity and to facilitate efficiency. When phraseology does not apply, the use of plain language should achieve the same goals as phraseology. Avoiding jargon and idioms whenever possible and being aware of the difficulty they may present will help make plain language clearer.

b) Overall, an awareness of the nature of jargon and idioms and how they can complicate communications will help pilots and controllers communicate more safely across linguistic and cultural barriers.

c) The function of the communication should be stated explicitly, especially when attempting to clarify or alleviate a concern in the mind of the speaker. The style of speech (form and register) should also be appropriate for a given situation. Take the example of a co-pilot asking the pilot, "How about those flaps?" to express concern that the flaps are not far enough extended for take-off. It is far better to state concerns explicitly: "We should extend the flaps further" or "Are the flaps extended correctly?" In radiotelephony

communications, controllers and pilots can ensure greater clarity with explicit statements. State the topic of concern explicitly. Be direct rather than indirect.

d) In native-speaker to native-speaker communications, speakers can use the context to assist understanding, and it has been common practice for language teachers to encourage students to use context to aid comprehension. Research has found, however, that second-language speakers rely much more heavily on pronunciation, rather than context, to understand. For radiotelephony communications, this implies that:

the role of pronunciation in the ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale must be given high priority; and

all speakers must move towards pronunciation patterns acceptable to the larger international aeronautical community.

e) While accent can sometimes be difficult to control, speakers can control intelligibility by moderating the rate of speech, limiting the number of pieces of information per utterance, and providing clear breaks between words and phrases.

10. OTHER SOUTH AFRICAN REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

10.1. General

a) ATO's and testing personnel must refer to Document SA-CATS 61.01.7 for legal requirements Some important requirements are repeated here:

i. Language Proficiency Requirements only apply to speaking and listening proficiency only and do not address the ability to read or write, in the English Language,
ii. An ICAO English Proficiency Test that includes the assessment of reading and writing skills is unacceptable and invalid,
iii. In accordance with the requirements, Pilots and Air Traffic Service Personnel shall demonstrate a minimum proficiency of at least Operational Level '4' of both ICAO Standard Phraseology and plain language, to be issued with or to maintain their respective licences,
iv. Pilots and Air Traffic Services Personnel who have not been rated at Level 6 proficiency shall be tested for English language proficiency at regular intervals to ensure that they remain proficient at the required level,
v. Pilots and Air Traffic Service Personnel who have been rated at Level 6 proficiency shall not require retesting,
vi. The interval retesting schedule referred to above is as follows:

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	PROFICIENCY TESTING INTERVAL
Level 5: Extended	Retesting required every six years
Level 4: Operational	Retesting required every three years

vii. Applicants assessed below Level 4 as well as applicants assessed at Level 4 and level 5 who wish to gain a Level rating shall be required to wait for a period of 90 days before applying for re-assessment,
viii. Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPIs) must be conducted jointly by a CAA registered Subject Matter Expert (SME) and a Linguistic Expert,
ix. OPIs shall be conducted using face-to-face interview procedures (In other words by a personal interview),
x. Each OPI shall be recorded electronically and stored for a minimum of 6 years in an archive system,
xi. All associated testing records shall be open for inspection and audits by the CAA,
xii. ATOs that wish to conduct LPR testing must apply to the CAA for Operations Specification (Ops Spec) approval,
xiii. Specific qualified experts associated with these organisations must also apply for registration Language Proficiency Interviewers/ Raters in accordance with their respective professional and academic qualifications,

xiv. LPR interviews and ratings may only be conducted by professionals registered as CAA Language Proficiency Interviewers (Raters),
xv. All CAA registered Language Proficiency Interviewers (Raters) shall demonstrate full proficiency (Level 6 competency) in their language usage,
xvi. Interviewers (Raters) must also sign a Code of Conduct concerning language-testing practices,
xvii. The associated appendices to SA-CATS are referred to in the References section of this TGM.

10.2. SAQA accreditation

The requirement for Approved Test Centres and Language Proficiency Interviewers (Raters) to hold SAQA accreditation is not currently enforced. This SAQA specification excludes specialist required to hold SAQA qualifications, such as teachers.

10.3. Acceptance of Prior Learning or Foreign CAA language certification

The provisions for the acceptance by the SACAA of prior learning and or foreign CAA language certification are stipulated in Document SA-CATS 61.1.7 Language. ATOs and applicants should note that, because ICAO Language Proficiency requirements presently relate to speaking and listening proficiency only (particularly via radiotelephony), certain schooling educational qualifications are unrelated to these verbal communication skills and consequently do not qualify for SACAA alternative language certification. The North American General Educational Development Test (GED) is one example of this.

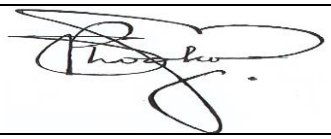
11. THE ICAO LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY RATING SCALE

Note. — The Operational Level (Level 4) is the minimum required proficiency level for radiotelephony communication

LEVEL	*PRONUNCIATION Assumes a dialect and/or accent intelligible to the aeronautical community.*	*STRUCTURE Relevant grammatical structures and sentence patterns are determined by language functions appropriate to the task.*	*VOCABULARY*	*FLUENCY*	*COMPREHENSION*	*INTERACTIONS*
Expert 6	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, though possibly influenced by the first language or regional variation, almost never interfere with ease of understanding.	Both basic and complex grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on a wide variety of familiar and unfamiliar topics. Vocabulary is idiomatic, nuanced, and sensitive to register.	Able to speak at length with a natural, effortless flow. Varies speech flow for stylistic effect, e.g. to emphasize a point. Uses appropriate discourse markers and connectors spontaneously.	Comprehension is consistently accurate in nearly all contexts and includes comprehension of linguistic and cultural subtleties.	Interacts with ease in nearly all situations. Is sensitive to verbal and non-verbal cues and responds to them appropriately.
Extended 5	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, though influenced by the first language or regional variation, rarely interfere with ease of understanding.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are consistently well controlled. Complex structures are attempted but with errors which sometimes interfere with meaning.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete, and work-related topics. Paraphrases consistently and successfully. Vocabulary is sometimes idiomatic.	Able to speak at length with relative ease on familiar topics but may not vary speech flow as a stylistic device. Can make use of appropriate discourse markers or connectors.	Comprehension is accurate on common, concrete, and work-related topics and mostly accurate when the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events. Is able to comprehend a range of speech varieties (dialect and/or accent) or registers.	Responses are immediate, appropriate, and informative. Manages the speaker/listener relationship effectively.
Operational 4	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation but only sometimes interfere with ease of understanding.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns are used creatively and are usually well controlled. Errors may occur, particularly in unusual or unexpected circumstances, but rarely interfere with meaning.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are usually sufficient to communicate effectively on common, concrete, and work-related topics. Can often paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary in unusual or unexpected circumstances.	Produces stretches of language at an appropriate tempo. There may be occasional loss of fluency on transition from rehearsed or formulaic speech to spontaneous interaction, but this does not prevent effective communication. Can make limited use of discourse markers or connectors. Fillers are not distracting.	Comprehension is mostly accurate on common, concrete, and work- related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. When the speaker is confronted with a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events, comprehension may be slower or require clarification strategies.	Responses are usually immediate, appropriate, and informative. Initiates and maintains exchanges even when dealing with an unexpected turn of events. Deals adequately with apparent misunderstandings by checking, confirming, or clarifying.
Levels 1, 2 and 3 are on subsequent page						

LEVEL	*PRONUNCIATION Assumes a dialect and/or accent intelligible to the aeronautical community.*	*STRUCTURE Relevant grammatical structures and sentence patterns are determined by language functions appropriate to the task.*	*VOCABULARY*	*FLUENCY*	*COMPREHENSION*	*INTERACTIONS*
Levels 4, 5 and 6 are on preceding page.						
Pre-operational 3	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are influenced by the first language or regional variation and frequently interfere with ease of understanding.	Basic grammatical structures and sentence patterns associated with predictable situations are not always well controlled. Errors frequently interfere with meaning.	Vocabulary range and accuracy are often sufficient to communicate on common, concrete, or work-related topics, but range is limited and the word choice often inappropriate. Is often unable to paraphrase successfully when lacking vocabulary.	Produces stretches of language, but phrasing and pausing are often inappropriate. Hesitations or slowness in language processing may prevent effective communication. Fillers are sometimes distracting.	Comprehension is often accurate on common, concrete, and work- related topics when the accent or variety used is sufficiently intelligible for an international community of users. May fail to understand a linguistic or situational complication or an unexpected turn of events.	Responses are sometimes immediate, appropriate, and informative. Can initiate and maintain exchanges with reasonable ease on familiar topics and in predictable situations. Generally inadequate when dealing with an unexpected turn of events.
Elementary 2	Pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are heavily influenced by the first language or regional variation and usually interfere with ease of understanding.	Shows only limited control of a few simple memorized grammatical structures and sentence patterns.	Limited vocabulary range consisting only of isolated words and memorized phrases.	Can produce very short, isolated, memorized utterances with frequent pausing and a distracting use of fillers to search for expressions and to articulate less familiar words.	Comprehension is limited to isolated, memorized phrases when they are carefully and slowly articulated.	Response time is slow and often inappropriate. Interaction is limited to simple routine exchanges.
Pre-elementary 1	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.	Performs at a level below the Elementary level.

12. DOCUMENT AUTHORISATION

DEVELOPED BY:		
	**THEO ODENDAAL**	**26 FEBRUARY 2025**
SIGNATURE OF TSO	**NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS**	**DATE**
REVIEWED & VALIDATED BY:		
	**PAUL PHOOKO**	**26 FEBRUARY 2025**
SIGNATURE OF SM: PEL	**NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS**	**DATE**
APPROVED BY:		
	DEAN KHUMALO	26 FEB 2025
SIGNATURE OF E: SSA	**NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS**	**DATE**

END