

Chapter 6. Language Testing Criteria for Global Harmonization

Assessment of language proficiency at Expert Level 6

6.2.8.10 The Level 6 descriptors in the ICAO Rating Scale refer to features of language use that go beyond the work-related context indicated in descriptors at lower levels. Formal evaluation of Level 6 using a specialized language test would follow an exhaustive procedure involving tasks and contexts that go beyond the subject matter of radiotelephony communications. Furthermore, since language proficiency at both ends of a proficiency scale is relatively easy to evaluate, it is not difficult to recognize “Expert” (including native or native-like) proficiency. For these reasons, the assessment at Level 6 should be carried out by a trained and qualified rater, but not necessarily by a language testing specialist, or require the use of a fully developed specialized language test.

6.2.8.11 Monolingual native speakers of the language should be considered as “probable expert speakers.” However, probable expert speakers may also include multilingual speakers who include the language as one of their native languages, and foreign-language speakers who have acquired a high level proficiency. A test-taker who is tentatively considered to be a Level 6 speaker of the language may be evaluated through informal assessments (such as interviews or oral interactions with licensing authorities, recruitment officers or flight examiners), supported by documented evidence about an individual's linguistic history. This history, to be determined by State authorities, could include:

- a) place of birth and early residence;
- b) the language(s) used during childhood in the family, in the community and in education;
- c) long periods of residence (with proven participation) in communities where the language is used socially, professionally or in education;
- d) extended periods of language study or higher education diplomas;
- e) very high scores in general language tests.

6.2.8.12 On the basis of such assessment of documented information, procedures should then be described and implemented for the formal validation of Level 6 proficiency. These procedures should be implemented and identified as assessment “events” rather than tests. They should involve a trained and qualified rater or rating team and should include assessment of language used in a work-related context with reference to the ICAO Rating Scale. The rater may be an operational flight or ATC examiner, and the procedure may be carried out through operational assessments which include a language proficiency component.

6.2.8.13 Although the relative ease of assessing proficiency at the Expert level allows flexibility in the way such assessments may be made, the demonstration of language proficiency is nonetheless an important element of the formal process that leads to the issuance of a pilot or an air traffic controller licence. It is therefore essential that each State establish appropriate procedures to ensure that the results of the assessment are properly documented. Because of its potential safety impact, and since the outcome of a Level 6 assessment is that no further demonstration of language proficiency will be required throughout a career, the informal validation of Level 6 proficiency without documented evidence is not recommended.

6.2.8.14 In cases where such a procedure invalidates a suspected Level 6, the candidate may either be referred to remedial training prior to a second application of the same testing procedure and/or referred to a formal specialized language testing procedure as described below. This procedure would be appropriate, for example, for native speakers whose accent or dialect is not intelligible to the aeronautical community.