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Methodological aspects of delivering effective Aviation English classes to future air traffic controllers

The paper gives a general overview of what makes a proficient Aviation English user from the perspective of the ICAO requirements. It is also considered the peculiarities of methodology underlying achievement of the above mentioned purpose.

Radiotelephony communication between a pilot and ATC can be defined as a professional communication that is carried out by means of radio-technical facilities and is aimed at ensuring flight operations safety. It is considered to be a part of aviation discourse that is characterized by the extensive use of specific aviation terminology and phraseology set forth by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Taking into account the facts that apart from specific terminology that makes the exchange of information between pilots and air traffic controllers be realized in the metalanguage radio communication is mostly done in English that in its turn is internationally recognized to be a bridge language - it is used to enable mutual understanding between interlocutors not sharing a native language and thus functioning as a global lingua franca – it is absolutely reasonable to conclude that the term "double standardization" has to be applied to identify the way in which misunderstanding as a factor leading to flight incidents and accidents is eliminated. However, it is definitely not possible to cover all the range of potential intended communication purposes with the set of standard key phrases. And that is the reason why plain English is almost an equally important tool for a speech act to achieve the desired effect.

For aviation English instructors it also presents a double challenge – on the one hand it is necessary to create favorable learning conditions for students to master the basics of the English language – grammar and vocabulary and on the other hand it is required to model job tasks that future air traffic controllers or pilots will have to fulfill using specific aviation terminology and phraseology and following the generally excepted standards. The latter can be specific pronunciation of numbers (the sound [θ] is replaced with [t] (three [θ r i: - t r i:]; thousand [θ a ʊ z ə d - t a ʊ z ə d]); the change in the word form as it is the case, for instance, with "nine" [n a ɪ n - 'n a ɪ n ə r]; the usage of the ICAO phonetic alphabet to refer to letters (taxiway R5 will be transmitted as Romeo 5); the usage of special words and word combinations to identify particular situations that is done for the purpose of brevity (MAYDAY as a distress signal or V1 – to indicate the decision speed); the extensive use of abbreviations such as PAPI, VASIS, ILS and code symbols (the acronym QFE that refers to atmospheric pressure and altimeter settings) – if to name a few [1, 195-196]. These issues are certainly of an applied nature – it means that future air traffic controllers cannot gain professionalism as effective communicators just by familiarizing themselves with the standards. A way to success lies in constant practice which has to be encouraged and organized in Aviation English classes

following the patterns of the communicative language teaching approach. Thus, students` activities should be centered around:

· Interactive exercises on spoken language comprehension that motivate to give answers and replies;

· Exchange of information and in-class role plays;

· Speaking exercises (in contrast to reading and writing) developing the vocabulary size and grammar knowledge;

· The use of visuals (layouts of the flight deck and instrument panel, charts etc.) and numerical data to reproduce operation situations and create a context for a discussion and problem-solving [2, 6].

In this respect pieces of the authentic radio telephony exchange is of great interest as such dialogues are made between real professionals at the rate peculiar to real-life situations and contain full details necessary to convey the message in two-way communication. Besides, a simple listening task aimed at finding answers to the proposed questions can then serve as a model following which students can make up their own questions and give answers to them.

It is also worth mentioning that due to a high level of standardization of radiotelephony communication even students with a poor command of English are able to participate in dramatized radiotelephony exchange - in the role of a pilot the task can be just to address an aeronautical station saying its name which is the location and the type of services being provided, to name the callsign for the aircraft and add a few elliptical sentences carrying the main message. It will surely lead to language skills improvement and is a motivating factor to learn more.

Moreover, it is extremely recommended to distinguish between pronunciation and grammar mistakes that are crucial for rendering the message and those which cannot lead to a misjudgment. According to the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements, even from users whose English is at Expert level 6 it is not required to have an ideal native-like pronunciation. The rating scale just says that it "assumes a dialect and/or accent intelligible to the aeronautical community" [3, 103].

In order for aviation English instructors to become aware of what is expected from students to be qualified as those who have the minimum required proficiency level for radiotelephony communication which is the Operational Level (Level 4) it is recommended to thoroughly examine the manual on the Implementation of ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements. Among other things it is given the list of the communicative language functions and tasks associated with aviation. The required abilities can be grouped in the following way:

· To announce and give orders;

· Accept and refuse an offer to act;

· To give and request advice, permission and approval;

· Announce acts and decisions

· To give information concerning future, present, immediate/recent past facts;

· State necessity;

· Be able to manage the pilot-controller interaction.

Thus, the prime task of the aviation English instructor is to organize students` in-class activity in such a way that all the above listed aspects are covered and given sufficient attention.

One of the key factors ensuring success in forming the ability to communicate in an aeronautical environment is students` motivation. The task is achieved when the appropriate atmosphere is created and maintained with the help of suitable training resources, techniques and even taking into account some biological properties of learners` attention – we can concentrate on a particular activity without being distracted for 20 minutes only, so what students do in a class has to be diversified at least to some extent.

Conclusion

We may conclude that teaching aviation English differs from delivering other ESP classes as the former fully relies on the set standards in addition to plain English and job tasks. The fulfillment of the objective to train proficient users is achieved on the basis of the communicative approach and the helpful strategy here is to use authentic radiotelephony exchanges.

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