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The Relevance of Language Awareness for Expert Speakers of Aviation English

Introduction

Intercommunication is one of the cornerstones of the air traffic system. The errors of Aviation personnel's intercommunication are very often a strong reason of many accidents. Such 'human errors' which cause the most of such events are often outcomes of so-called 'bad habits'. Air staff (pilots and air traffic controllers) have the responsibility to distinguish and demolish these habits and carry out one's operation with a high level of professionalism. Aviation English (AE) is a world language that enables routine and non-routine aeronautical intercommunications among professional specialists who can speak different native languages. Although, such communication requirements not only for non-native speakers of English, but also for those people whose mother tongue is English as communication is seen as a kind of behavior – 'linguistic behavior' (see Linke 2001: 173). The risks of misunderstanding are too high in the aviation environment. As AE has its own regulations to be followed and demands being brief and clear, the focus should be imposed on language practice in all its eventual aspects, involving native English speakers in this process.

Aviation English Expert speakers

Expert speakers of Aviation English are both aviation staff being native English speakers (NS) who are not obligatory to pass any language tests and non-native English speakers who have been examined for the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Due to the practicing English by non-native speakers (NNS) while a lot of things have been done, it is time to concentrate on the first group, chiefly native speakers performing their operational tasks in English, either pilots or air traffic controllers. Their profitable use of English in aviation contexts is commonly taken for granted.

Within their regular education all pilots and controllers, involving those who are native English speakers, are given the instruction in ICAO or Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) standardized phraseology on radiotelephony which they have to use respectively in aeronautical communication.

Hence the abovementioned recommendation is also assigned to those expert speakers of Aviation English, who are native English speakers and who may be provided no more specific tests or disputes regarding this issue, not to mention practice in the ordinary English that they are planning to use in the aviation environment. Consequently, these expert speakers (ES – for the purposes of this article the abbreviation 'ES' stands for expert speakers of Aviation English who are at the same time native speakers of English) encounter a real test from the first days of their actual work, namely communication with non-native speakers that suddenly arises to be quite demanding. In addition, when an expert speaker for whom English is his mother tongue uses his English with people for whom English is a second language, it is used

in that capacity as a global language not only by non-native speakers of English, but also by native speakers themselves (Modiano 2010: 61).

Among ICAO descriptors for proficient experienced speakers there should be such skills as such:

• communicate on general, concrete and professional topics with accuracy and clarity;

• use appropriate communicative strategies to exchange messages and to notice and resolve misunderstandings in a general or work-related context;

• handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complicacy or sudden turn of events that happens within the context of a routine work situation or communicative task with which they are familiar with;

• use a dialect or accent intelligible to the aeronautical community that almost never interfere with ease of understanding.

It is considered that there should exist a standard pronunciation as a model to be taught. Though efforts have been made to invent and recommend certain standards for it. If there are none, we are left with a sort of English pronunciation easily understood throughout the English-speaking world (by both NS and NNS). Jones defines 'bad' speech as "a way of talking which is difficult for most people to understand. It is caused by mumbling or lack of definiteness of utterance" (Jones 2002: 4). ICAO is conscious of the issue pointing out that improvements and progress could be made in case native English speakers also should be familiarized with the challenges faced by NNS and adopt certain strategies such as:

• Learning strategies to improve cross-cultural communications;
• Abstaining from the use of idioms, colloquialisms, and other jargon;
• Modulating the rate of delivery;
• Making sure there is not too much information in a single transmission.

Modelling expert speakers' linguistic behavior

After the evaluation of education needs has been fulfilled, the purpose is to not only make ES competent and experienced of their linguistic behavior, but also put forward the helpful ways of dealing with communicative breakdowns by taking apparent actions during aeronautical (specifically pilot/controller) communication. Such education does not claim at teaching them a language, but rather to train their communicative competence. It may be carried out as a set of workshops based on teamwork, but NS should not cooperate with themselves during such practice. Also it is advised their instructor should also be a NNS to increase communication manipulation chances.

Main conditions to develop ES' performance are the following:

• awareness

ES should be conscious of the potential problems their linguistic behavior may raise during interaction with NNS (in particular, at ICAO operational level 4). NNS' target language is greatly influenced by the syntax, semantics and pronunciation of their own mother tongue. There may exist a disparity between a performance of NNS engaged in a conversation and what an ES awaits a conversation to sound like. This

awareness can often enrich ES training, diminish coordination time between a pilot and controller and assist to solve operational tasks.

• knowledge

It may be shown to expert speakers what actions they can undertake, notably which techniques they may employ, to progress communication process.

• willingness

Without the proper treatment, precisely willingness to transform existing conversational conventions, much cannot be carried out. When they fulfill these conditions, NS would see how beneficial they can be.

• ability

These components are essential for usage the motivational and knowledge-based challenges that appear during intercommunication.

The education skills should be provided for expert speakers with practical tips how to assume these strategies.

The structures of aviation phraseology may be assumed for messages in comprehensible English. NNS should be aware of grammar rules and the meaning of lexical units, aim at using them correctly, while NS should be aware of metalinguistics, various levels of language in use, focus on strategies they employ to negotiate meaning in order to maximize comprehensibility (see Canagarajah 2006: 210).

Finally, ES trainers should provide profound intensive research-based approaches and activities that enable students to successful communication in AE and develop tasks that can be appointed to them.

Conclusion

To summarize, there is a definite necessity for investigation in order to check the frequent problems with language. ES are not obligated to study a global language on a daily basis to increase their strategic competence and efficiency. Most ES are completely unaware of their capacity to simplify global comprehension. This deficiency of knowledge and experience as well as the resulting incapability to take entire advantage and benefit of their conversational competence can be very costly. Nowadays it seems to be appropriate time to alter living communicative conventions and emphasize the necessity to prepare ES, from the very beginning, to conceive the speech of NNS in an ordinary way, but also to make themselves sound coherent and intelligible. By being competent of eventual problems in aviation conversation with NNS, ES should only know which techniques they have to employ and in which way. This can assist them to encounter the problem and be more resilient in solving communication breakdowns.

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