



English for Aeronautical Communication

Anna P. Borowska (Ed.)

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English is an indispensable lingua franca in the high-stakes field of global aviation. As modern engineering has significantly reduced mechanical failures, the contributory factor of aviation safety has shifted to human factors. English for aeronautical communication (also known as Aviation English) has thus emerged as a primary concern and an important factor contributing to accidents and incidents. Aeronautical communication is fundamentally a “coded” language that requires specialized knowledge beyond everyday expression.

The publication *English for Aeronautical Communication*, authored by Anna P. Borowska, a pioneer in the interdisciplinary field of “avialinguistics”, bridges the gap between theoretical linguistics and aviation operation practices. This new book adopts a cognitive approach. This approach is designed to go beyond rote memorization. Instead, it focuses on developing real communicative competence. The goal is to enable learners to effectively utilize language in real-world context. As Ramsey Ferrer notes in the Foreword, this book is not merely a language textbook but a “gateway to mastering the art and science of aviation communication” (p. xvii). The book is organized into three parts. It guides the readers from the legal and theoretical fundamentals to the practices in flight phases, and then to the complex psychological and human factors that influence communication.

The first part of the book, “Fundamentals for Radiotelephony Communications”, lays the groundwork for newcomers and novices in the field. This section introduces the principles and regulations concerning radiotelephony. Borowska emphasizes that these regulations are not just annoying paperwork, but strict language standards that are vital for flight safety.

The book begins by introducing international regulations, language testing, and the unique features of aeronautical discourse. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards

and recommendations. It emphasizes that how English serves as *lingua franca* yet demands specialized English language proficiency. By reviewing the historical background (from the 1951 decision to make English the official language of aviation to the implementation of proficiency requirements in 2008), Borowska explains why we learn what we learn.

One of the most useful sections addresses the commonly feared language proficiency tests in Chapter 2. For many pilots and air traffic controllers (ATCOs), the ICAO Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs) could be a source of anxiety. Borowska breaks down the six critical descriptors (i.e., pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and interactions). This taxonomy helps learners understand not just how to pass a test, but what safe air-to-ground communication actually sounds like. Chapter 3 examines the distinctive features of aeronautical communication. The discourse characteristics of Aviation English are its coded structure, syntactic simplicity, lexical precision, and pragmatic emphasis on clarity, all designed to minimize ambiguity in high-stakes environments (Borowska, 2017).

One of the most critical theoretical distinctions made in the book is between Standard Phraseology (SP) and Plain Aeronautical English (PAE). As detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, SP is described as a “linguistic tool” that is designed for routine operations to ensure brevity and non-ambiguity. It is a restricted register where creativity is discouraged in favor of predictability. However, Borowska points out that SP provides no ready-made solutions for the unexpected and non-routine situations. This aligns with broader linguistic research, which categorizes SP and PAE as two distinct specialized registers, each serving complementary functions in the pilot-controller dialogue (Bieswanger, 2013).

Chapter 5, “Specialized Language for Non-Routine Operations”, emphasizes the need for language skills to manage emergencies. The author argues that PAE is not “casual conversation” on the frequency. It is a specialized skill involving simple grammar and direct vocabulary to manage emergency when the prescribed codes are insufficient. Subsequent chapters 6 to 10 build essential background knowledge by covering airport infrastructure, aircraft components, basic principles of flight, distinctions between VFR and IFR operations, and meteorological hazards, culminating in a consolidation section.

If Part I explains the rules of the game, Part II, “Aeronautical Communications,” takes the reader through operational practices. This part

is organized logically according to the phases of flight. Borowska emphasizes the necessity of understanding communications, particularly for Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) operations, to ensure that pilots and ATCOs are prepared for the demanding requirements of instrument flight.

Part II begins with “On the Ground” (Chapter 1), which covers the various communications that occur prior to taxiing, such as crew checks, turnaround activities, and aircraft walkaround inspections, emphasizing teamwork and essential vocabulary for ground readiness. Chapter 2, “Pre-flight operations”, addresses the initial radiotelephony communications prior to taxiing, including requesting ATIS, route clearance, start-up, and pushback, with Borowska using excerpts to demonstrate the strict “communication loop” of readback and hearback that prevents errors.

As the flight proceeds to “Take-off and initial climb” (Chapter 3) and “En route” (Chapter 4), the book introduces the dynamic nature of air traffic control. The text explores the complicated procedures of cruising, managing altitude changes, and navigating airspace boundaries. A very valuable aspect of Chapter 4 is the coverage of radar vectoring and traffic information, which requires pilots to build a mental picture of the airspace based on verbal cues.

The true value of Part II is its emphasis on non-routine situations. As noted in the Foreword, the inclusion of non-routine situations like adverse weather conditions, engine failure or technical malfunctions require readers to develop situational awareness and adaptability. For example, the “Descent, approach and landing” section (Chapter 5) does not just cover a standard ILS approach. It prepares the learner for missed approaches, go-arounds, and diversions.

The particularly impactful chapter in this part is Chapter 6, “Emergency Procedures”. The chapter examines the difference between Distress (*MAYDAY*) and Urgency (*PANPAN*). Borowska uses two well-known case studies (e.g., the US Airways Flight 1549 and the Tenerife airport disaster) to emphasize the serious consequences of miscommunication. Learners can see how miscommunication can lead to accidents and incidents by analyzing real transcripts. These case studies help promote learners’ critical thinking and encourage learners to analyze events carefully. Readers could apply their theoretical knowledge in high-pressure simulations. This approach enhances their understanding and prepares them for real-world communication challenges.

The last part of the book, “Aeronautical communication contributing factors”, goes beyond the text from a training manual to a systemic examination of human factors. It explores the broader, often invisible elements that influence effective communication in aviation. It goes beyond vocabulary lists to cover the cognitive and cultural factors appearing in the cockpit.

In the first chapter, Borowska introduces concepts like “expectation bias”, which is the tendency to hear what we expect to hear rather than what is actually said. This represents a dangerous risk in aviation. A pilot may “hear” a clearance to cross a runway simply because they are accustomed to receiving it. Borowska offers strategies to address these cognitive shortcuts. It emphasizes active listening and thus highlights the importance of SP. These practices serve as defense mechanisms against complacency.

The next chapter presents an important blind spot in aviation. It challenges the assumption that native speakers are inherently safe communicators. Borowska simplifies complex regulatory contexts to reveal an important phenomenon in a real operational context. ICAO regulations and requirements exist, but native speakers often skip rigorous training that is required for their non-native peers. She claims that the important protocols and guidelines set by ICAO create an “ethical obligation” for native speakers to actively adjust their linguistic behavior to ensure intelligibility (ICAO, 2010). By removing informal language and managing the speed of speech, this chapter enhances the book’s pedagogical value. The chapter introduces structured communication activities tailored for native speakers for effective communication in high-frequency situations.

The book concludes with a chapter titled “Unexpected turn of events”. Unlike many manuals that advise pilots to “stay calm”, the author offers specific linguistic tools to navigate chaos. She introduces a new pedagogical emphasis on Reported Speech. The ability to accurately deliver information, such as “The purser said smoke was coming from the galley”, is crucial during crisis management and post-incident debriefings. This focus enhances communication skills in high-pressure situations.

While *English for Aeronautical Communication* is undeniably an ambitious and comprehensive work, its broad scope inevitably involves certain trade-offs. The book targets a broad audience, from trainee pilots to applied linguists. This broad approach could make some sections too complicated for new pilots and others too simple for experienced ones.

Despite the challenges inherent in addressing such a diverse audience, *English for Aeronautical Communication* is a significant contribution of interdisciplinary scholarship. This book sets a new standard in radiotelephony communication instruction by offering a multifaceted resource that caters to a diverse audience. For learners such as pilots and ATCOs, the book offers a structured and practical approach to ICAO compliance. It includes authentic dialogues that reflect real-world scenarios and actionable strategies for IFR operations in both routine and non-routine contexts. Educators will find a comprehensive curriculum that effectively balances theory with authentic materials. This approach enhances teaching and learning experiences. Meanwhile, researchers and linguists receive a foundational text in “avialinguistics”. This text clearly shows how applied linguistics can contribute to aviation operation safety. As the Foreword mentions, this book is “not merely a guide but a gateway”. It contributes directly to the safety and efficiency of air operations worldwide. For other stakeholders in the aviation industry, *English for Aeronautical Communication* is an essential addition to their library. It reminds us that in the vast, open skies, our safety often depends on the clarity and precision of every spoken transmission.

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