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CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS IN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCE OF MAJORS IN AVIATION

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Professionally oriented training implies involvement of professional knowledge and job-related skills. Therefore, the National English for Specific Purposes Curriculum focuses on integrated approach to the formation of linguistic and specialism-related competence. Communication factors (media, terminology and language) are of primary importance in Aviation English as communication failures pose serious threats to flight safety.

Aviation English is characterized by standardized phraseology, which covers routine situations, and plain English, which is "the spontaneous, creative, and non-coded use of English" for non-routine events [1]. The lack of English language proficiency contributes to miscommunication and hence, to incidents and accidents. However, Aviation English proficiency differs a lot from what is seen as proficiency in general English.

1) Native speakers should not be taken for role models in pronunciation.

Due to the fact that non-native users of English by far outnumber native users in aviation domain native speakers cannot be referred to as models for pronunciation. Moreover, there are special standardized requirements for the transmission of letters and numbers. Numbers are likely to cause confusion when providing the information about call signs and flight levels. That's why it is imperative for pilots and air traffic controllers to practice hearing numbers spoken by speakers from a variety of cultural backgrounds in a variety of settings, including emergencies.

2) Polysemy should be avoided.

While in general English the speakers' ability to express themselves spontaneously and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning is highly appreciated, the use of synonyms in aviation standardized phraseology and application of phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions in plain English are not acceptable due to "safety-critical requirements for intelligibility, directness, appropriacy, non-ambiguity and concision" of the language [2].

3) The language structure should be simplified.

ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) standardized phraseology is characterized not only by reduced vocabulary but also by the absence of determiners, auxiliary and link verbs, subject pronouns and prepositions. It contains short sentences, many of which are imperative or passive.

4) Accuracy should be rated higher than fluency.

While in general English fluency is one of the clear indicators of high language proficiency level, in Aviation English fast speech rate contributes to misunderstanding and communication failures. Therefore, ICAO recommends a speech rate of 100 words per minute in radiotelephony communication [2]. Speaking slowly may help to understand the instructions better and avoid the need to ask to repeat them. Shorter messages are also helpful in reducing miscommunication.

ICAO Language Proficiency test has been developed to measure the proficiency of pilots and air traffic controllers. The test is designed to check six language proficiency skills: Pronunciation, Structure, Vocabulary, Fluency, Comprehension and Interactions. Pilots and controllers must demonstrate proficiency to a minimum Operational Level 4. The ICAO Language Proficiency Rating Scale has some specific features:

- a) the Scale addresses only Speaking and Listening, it does not assess Reading and Writing skills;
- b) the Scale has a distinct aeronautical radiotelephony focus; it addresses the use of language in a work-related aviation context, voice-only communications;
- c) Grammar, Syntax, Vocabulary and Pronunciation are judged primarily to the extent that they do not interfere with effective oral communication;
- d) the final rating is not the average of the ratings in each of the six ICAO language proficiency skills but the lowest of these six ratings.

Due to the global nature of aviation, pilots and air traffic controllers are hardly likely to share the same linguistic fluency and associated understanding of social and cultural norms of communication. That is why it is necessary to take into consideration cultural aspects of air safety. There are three levels of culture which have significant impact on flight safety: national culture (reflects characteristics and values of particular nations), professional culture (reflects the behaviour and characteristics of particular professional groups) and organizational culture (reflects the behaviour and values of particular organizations). It is the level of an organization that provides a frame for national and professional cultures and development of safety culture nowadays.

As the actions of people are affected by different cultural backgrounds, they react differently in response to the same events and situations. Ethnic groups may differ in their reactions to superiors and the way they express their individuality, as well as in their behaviour under certain conditions. Being a manifestation of a specific national culture, speech styles and foreign accents of non-native English speakers can cause communication problems and result in potential safety threats. Therefore, non-native speakers are recommended to improve the level of their language proficiency. Equally, the national culture of native English speakers and their experience in General English may also interfere with their professional culture and performance. As a consequence, it is crucial that native speakers should avoid using

idioms, colloquialisms and other jargon in radiotelephony communications and moderate their speech rate [3].

Cross-cultural awareness training should be implemented to improve language proficiency in Aviation English. Majors in Aviation can be exposed to a variety of communication patterns and non-native speakers' accents from a variety of cultural backgrounds by means of documentary videos and e-learning programs. For example, the well-known e-learning systems for Aviation English DynEd and Relta help improve Pronunciation, Structure, Vocabulary, Fluency, Comprehension and Interactions. It is essential to introduce integrated development of socio-cultural and specialism-related foreign language competence of Aviation majors with the view to enhancing flight safety.

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