

Linguistic Challenges in Aviation English For Non-Native Speakers

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Abstract: This study examines the main linguistic challenges faced by non-native speakers in learning and using Aviation English. Although English is the international language of aviation, many professionals operate in multilingual environments where misunderstanding can occur. The paper focuses on semantic, phonetic, and pragmatic difficulties that affect communication. The findings show that linguistic factors play a key role in miscommunication, and effective teaching strategies should address these issues directly.

Keywords: Aviation English, linguistic challenges, non-native speakers, semantic ambiguity, phonetic variation, pragmatic competence, cross-linguistic influence, aviation communication, ESP (English for Specific Purposes).

Introduction: English has been established as the global language of aviation to ensure safety and clarity in communication. International organizations such as ICAO have developed standardized phraseology to minimize ambiguity and misunderstanding [1, 34]. However, in real-life situations, many pilots and air traffic controllers are non-native speakers of English, which creates additional challenges. These challenges are not limited to grammar or vocabulary. Instead, they are often rooted in deeper linguistic issues such as meaning variation, pronunciation differences, and context-dependent usage. Miscommunication in aviation can lead to serious consequences, which makes it essential to understand the linguistic nature of these difficulties [2, 112]. Furthermore, the influence of a speaker's native language cannot be ignored. Cross-linguistic differences may lead to interference, where learners interpret or produce language based on the patterns of their first language. This can result in misunderstandings, especially in situations where precise interpretation is essential. Therefore, it is important to analyze how linguistic factors contribute to communication challenges in aviation.

The aim of this study is to identify and analyze the main

linguistic challenges faced by non-native speakers in Aviation English, focusing on semantic, phonetic, and pragmatic aspects. By examining these issues, the study also seeks to suggest practical strategies that can improve the teaching and learning of Aviation English in multilingual contexts. This study aims to analyze the main linguistic challenges in Aviation English and to suggest possible solutions based on linguistic and pedagogical perspectives.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach. The data were collected from aviation manuals, ICAO documents, and examples of pilot-controller communication. In addition, selected aviation terms and phrases were analyzed from a linguistic perspective.

The study focuses on three main areas:

- semantic features of aviation terminology;
- phonetic characteristics of spoken communication;
- pragmatic use of language in context.

Comparative analysis was also used to examine how non-native speakers interpret aviation terms

differently depending on their linguistic background. Furthermore, authentic communication samples were examined to identify common patterns of misunderstanding in real-life situations. Special attention was given to frequently used operational phrases in order to understand how meaning is constructed in context. The study also considers the role of learners' first language in shaping their interpretation of aviation terms. In addition, examples were selected to illustrate typical pronunciation and semantic errors made by non-native speakers. Finally, the analysis aims to connect linguistic observations with practical teaching implications

RESULTS

The results of the study indicate that linguistic challenges in Aviation English are multifaceted, involving semantic, phonetic, and pragmatic aspects that significantly affect communication efficiency.

1. Semantic challenge. One of the major difficulties is semantic ambiguity. Many aviation terms have meanings that differ from their general English usage. For example, the word holds in everyday English means "to keep something," while in aviation it refers to maintaining a specific position in the airspace.

Non-native speakers may rely on their prior knowledge of general English, which can lead to misunderstanding. This type of semantic shift creates confusion, especially in time-sensitive situations [3, 88].

2. Phonetic challenges. Pronunciation is another important issue. Different accents and phonetic patterns may reduce intelligibility in communication. For instance, numbers such as fifteen and fifty are often confused, which can lead to operational errors. To address this problem, ICAO introduced standardized pronunciation forms such as niner for nine to improve clarity [4, 55]. Despite this, many learners still struggle with accurate pronunciation, especially under stress.

3. Pragmatic challenges. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in context. In aviation, communication is highly structured and requires precise interpretation of instructions.

Non-native speakers may understand the words but fail to grasp the intended meaning in a specific situation. For example, maintain altitude is not just a statement but a directive that must be followed immediately. This shows that understanding aviation language requires not only linguistic knowledge but also awareness of communicative context [5, 101].



Figure 1 illustrates how linguistic factors may lead to communication breakdowns

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that linguistic challenges in Aviation English are complex and interconnected. Semantic ambiguity, pronunciation issues, and pragmatic misunderstandings all contribute to communication difficulties.

These problems are often intensified by cross-linguistic influence, where learners transfer patterns from their native language into English. As a result, even advanced learners may experience difficulties in real-time communication. The importance of pragmatic competence. Understanding the intended meaning of an utterance requires awareness of context, not just vocabulary knowledge. Non-native speakers may

understand individual words but fail to recognize their communicative function, especially when instructions are indirect or situation-specific.

Based on these findings, it can be suggested that teaching Aviation English should move beyond traditional memorization-based methods. More effective approaches may include context-based learning, simulation exercises, and the use of authentic communication materials. These methods can help learners develop not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to use language appropriately in real-life situations

To overcome these challenges, teaching methods should go beyond memorization. Context-based learning, simulation exercises, and focused

pronunciation training can significantly improve learners' performance. In addition, incorporating cognitive strategies can help learners better understand and retain specialized terminology [1, 42].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the challenges faced by non-native speakers in Aviation English are largely rooted in linguistic factors rather than only general language proficiency. The analysis shows that semantic ambiguity, phonetic variation, and pragmatic complexity significantly influence the accuracy and effectiveness of communication in aviation contexts. These factors are often interconnected and may create serious difficulties, especially in real-time situations where quick and precise responses are required.

The findings also highlight the impact of cross-linguistic differences, as learners tend to rely on their native language when interpreting unfamiliar terms. This can lead to misunderstandings or incomplete comprehension, particularly when aviation terminology differs from general English usage. In addition, pronunciation issues and limited pragmatic awareness may reduce intelligibility and affect the correct interpretation of instructions. Based on these observations, it is clear that teaching Aviation English should not be limited to vocabulary memorization or grammar practice. Instead, greater emphasis should be placed on developing learners' ability to understand meaning in context, use language appropriately, and respond effectively in real communication scenarios. Incorporating context-based learning, simulation exercises, and focused pronunciation training can help address the identified challenges and improve overall communicative competence.

Finally, this study suggests that a more linguistically informed approach to teaching Aviation English can contribute to safer and more efficient communication in the aviation industry. Future research may focus on experimental studies or classroom-based interventions to further explore effective teaching strategies and to evaluate their impact on learners' performance.

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