Aviation English and Safety

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January 25, 2021

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According to Baugh and Stolzer (2018), communications problems in aviation can occur between pilots or between pilots and air traffic controllers. These problems can occur between native English speakers as well as any combination of native and non-native English speakers (Baugh & Stolzer, 2018). Findings presented at a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) workshop in 1979 concluded that a major cause of air carrier accidents was due to human error. The specific causes of these accidents involved failures in leadership, decision making and communication (McKeel, 2012).

Aviation Safety Reporting System

There is existing data concerning aviation incidents in the NASA Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS) which is a voluntary safety reporting system for pilots, controllers and other aviation personnel and crew members. The purpose of the ASRS is to collect, analyze and respond to these voluntary incident reports to reduce the probability that these incidents will occur again in the future (NASA, n.d.). A preliminary search of ASRS incident reports between January 2009 and January 2019 revealed 15,725 reports related to a breakdown in communication. If the communication breakdown is related to a lack of proficiency in aviation English, specific words such as English, foreign, language and accent should appear in the narrative and synopsis of these reports. Narrowing the search to reports that contain these words reduced the number to 603 reports. A preliminary review of these reports revealed that many were related to problems with aviation English.

This study will seek to answer the following question: How does a lack of proficiency in aviation English lead to communication failures in aviation incidents and accidents? An analysis of existing data from the ASRS will be performed to determine the answer to this question.

References

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