



Anna Borowska,
Avialinguistics. The Study of Language
***for Aviation Purposes.* Frankfurt am Main:**
Peter Lang 2017, ISBN 978-3-631-72138-4, 334 pages

Anna Borowska's monograph is the first comprehensive coverage of the specialized language used in aviation communication. The term *avialinguistics*, coined by the author, is used for the first time in this very book to refer to "the interdisciplinary science that covers the linguistic study of aviation language in use" (p. 19). Although the bulk of the book is devoted to the delineation of the new field of research and building foundation for a new discipline, it provides a rich assortment of practical implications, related mainly to the training of professionals whose careers will be connected with civil aeronautics. As the author puts it, "the applied objective aims to support and advocate the improvement of the training process and the quality of aeronautical communication in order to enhance global safety" (p. 20).

The book consists of seven major chapters, introduction, bibliography, appendix, subject index, list of abbreviations, and list of illustrations, extending over 334 pages. The bibliography is impressive—it contains as many as 470 items, covering almost all relevant literature on the subject. The index, however, constitutes a negative counterbalance, encompassing only 37 headwords, which do not offer much help in searching for information within the book. The appendix contains the questionnaire which was used by the author in the study reported in Chapter 7. All in all, the book makes an impression of a neat and orderly elaboration, characterized by clear and detailed structure (although not balanced between particular chapters), very rich in content, both in its theoretical and practical dimension. It is very well prepared when it comes to the general layout and consistency of highlighting conventions, but there are a few (fortunately infrequent) editorial faults, mainly in form of grammatical mistakes: "having **attending** thematic conferences" (p. 19), "256 respondents (81%) did not **observed** any..." (p. 276), "I will present those that **seems** to be..." (p. 280) or "aviation language **which** use is strictly connected with..." (p. 283).

The introduction to the book serves a typical organizational-rationalizing function, it is very well written and provides a clear statement of the most important objectives. The first chapter (pp. 25–43), in turn, is devoted to the historical perspective and delineating the origins of the specialized language known today as *Aviation English*. In a convincing, interesting, and relatively concise manner, the author presents the civilizational, cultural, and professional circumstances which led to the emergence of the language of aviation and provides explanation for the fact that the English language assumed the role of a commonly accepted medium of communication in aeronautical contexts. In addition, we also find there the account of the origins and the description of the procedures introduced by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) pertaining to the language competence level of the candidates for international aviation service. This is one of the most important issues, as it turns out later on, because the author points out the discrepancy between the criteria applied for native and non-native speakers of English. This factor, reiterated in the following chapters as a potential source of various problems brought up and discussed by the author, is one of the major incentives for the modifications in the training procedures put forward in the concluding parts of the book.

The second chapter (pp. 45–100) is much longer and performs the constitutive role for *avialinguistics*, where the author takes up an ambitious challenge of defining it as a new and independent area of investigation. Positioning herself as a pioneer, first of all she had to point out the shortcomings and problems inherent in the existing approaches and accounts. It must be admitted that the argumentation presented in the initial parts of the chapter is quite convincing, especially when it comes to the shortage of literature on such contexts of specialized aviation communication as the aircraft maintenance service or passenger service (interestingly, the author herself does not analyze such contexts in the practical part of the book, either). Additionally, it is claimed that the majority of scholars place *Aviation Language* alongside other types of specialized languages under the common banner of *Language/English for Specific Purposes*, ignoring the specificity and the interdisciplinary character of *Aviation English*. The originality of Borowska's proposition lies in the attempt to define *avialinguistics* as an inherently different, interdisciplinary field, requiring a novel approach recognizing the mutual contribution of the three disciplines: applied linguistics, specialized languages and aviation. *Avialinguistics* is thus defined as "the study of aviation language in all its professional aspects in relation to practical problems" (p. 55).

The following subsections attempt to sketch the range of avialinguistic research, its object, aims, and purposes. Here the discussion becomes a bit less clear and is burdened with a number of problems. For example, the author emphasizes the necessity of focus on individual users of *Aviation English* in concrete situations, but in the schematic representation in page 57 this indi-

vidual perspective is missing, unless the whole diagram refers only to such individualized instances. It is also a bit unclear where the border between *pure avialinguistics* and *applied avialinguistics* lies, because some elements described by Borowska as belonging to the former, such as the study of aviation language instruction, seem to belong to the applied branch. Another problematic issue is the model of language assumed as the linguistic foundation of the new discipline, because the only thing which the author explicitly states is that she understands language “not [as] an artificial product created by a researcher on purpose in order to use it for substituting a real analyzed phenomenon, but rather an aviation language in use, in real life” (p. 59). I cannot say if this entails rejection of any theoretical model of language, or only those which rely on more formalized representations; no positively formulated references are made to any of the existing models.

Significant improvement can be found in the final subchapter (2.5), outlining *Aviation Language* and its aeronautical variant. Of particular value is the way in which Borowska uncovers the inconsistencies and inaccuracies identified in the way various authors define such terms as *Aviation Language*, *Aviation English* or *Aeronautical English*, as well as their relation to general English. A natural consequence is the new definition of *Aviation Language* (p. 64), and delineation of *Aeronautical English* as a concrete sub-register, encompassing radio communication employing *Standard Phraseology* (SP) and *Plain Aeronautical Language* (PAL). Thus defined sub-register emerges as the major area of interest for the Author in the remaining part of the book. An extremely important move is placing *Aeronautical English* outside the boundaries of general (standard) English, due to frequent occurrence of phonetic, morphological, and syntactic forms not found in the standard variation of English (richly exemplified in pages 78–92). The Author also points to a unique specificity of *Aviation English* used as *lingua franca*, manifested in its remarkable regularity and stability, subjected to many limitations and standardizing tendencies, which is not found in other contexts related to the use of English in international and intercultural communication. Such a high level of standardization and prescriptive norms make it a variation which even native speakers of English must be taught in order to be able to communicate effectively and faultlessly with all other professionals in aviation industry, irrespective of their linguistic and cultural background.

The third chapter of the monograph (pp. 101–136) focuses on the communicational aspects of *Aviation Language* and presents it from the perspective of the participants of aeronautical communication, attempting at the same time to present the phenomenon within the discourse analytic perspective. However, apart from a few references to short works by Cook (2011) and Schiffrin (1994), no explicit links are made to the more important and more voluminous elaborations by such authors as, for example, Teun van Dijk. Thus, it turns out that

the efforts to place *avialinguistics* within the framework of Discourse Analysis in fact boil down to elaboration on those contextual factors which have to be taken into consideration in the analysis. Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that the relationship between *Aviation Discourse* and *Aeronautical Discourse* outlined by Borowska, where the latter term is seen both as a lower rank, more specific, but at the same time exclusive from the former, is far from clear, especially that *Aeronautical English* is presented on page 67 as an inclusive variant of *Aviation English*. If such a relationship holds on the level of English, why doesn't it hold on the level of discourse?

In the middle of the chapter Borowska puts forward a new approach to the description of texts connected with aeronautics, but what initially looks like an announcement of a presentation of her own typology of such texts turns out to be a discussion of the criteria which need to be taken into consideration in the process of its compilation. Towards the end the Author shifts the focus to the spoken mode of aeronautical communication, although the possibility of text channel exploitation is also mentioned. Such factors as sequential nature of discourse, taking advantage of technological solutions, the rights ascribed to particular roles performed by speakers, and acceptable forms and functions of particular messages are highlighted as the most important factors influencing this type of communication. In my opinion those remarks prepare the ground for the following chapter, where a detailed discussion of aeronautical discourse segmentation is offered. What I found problematic in this section was the reference to a couple of pragmatic theories (Searle, Grice) and theoretical accounts of conversation analysis (Schegloff and Sacks), which made an impression of a bit forced and unnecessary, as if the Author wanted to demonstrate that she is familiar with these theoretical conceptions. What is the point, for example, of discussing Grice's Maxims of Conversation, which were proposed as a part of the theoretical account of implicature formation? The aeronautical discourse is meant to involve mostly unambiguous, clear, and ostensive communication, without any necessity of relying on implied senses, which could even be potentially dangerous and definitely unwelcome.

Chapter four (pp. 137–181) is a very detailed survey of important linguistic features and elements of *Aeronautical English*, divided into two major parts. The first one is devoted to *Standard Phraseology* (SP), the basic register used in aeronautical communication, whereas the second one to *Plain Aeronautical English* (PAE), which constitutes a certain extension of the former in situations which are untypical and non-standard. SP constitutes a system of communication which is almost completely regulated and pre-scribed in official documentation. The norms and rules pertain to controlled exploitation of prosody (especially intonation and pauses), specific syntax, lexis, grammatical features and even pronunciation, which in some cases should be different from standard English. PAE is regulated to a lesser extent, but it still imposes the use of such

constructions and lexis which guarantee easy and problem-free understanding. The discussion is very detailed and well-organized, and it very convincingly and strongly exposes the uniqueness and exceptionality of this form of communication. The only thing which is not very clearly stated in this part of the book is where all the examples come from, whether they were borrowed from ICAO manuals or individually collected by the Author from authentically occurring conversations. It is only on page 285, in the final chapter of the book, where Borowska unambiguously identifies the source of her examples: it turns out that they were recorded and transcribed from authentic dialogues broadcast on www.liveatc.net page.

The fifth chapter (pp. 183–217) is a very illustrative overview of communication errors which in majority of cases led to fatal accidents, involving loss of many lives. Most of those examples had already been described in the literature, but Borowska's compilation is organized according to a typology of errors based on their moment of occurrence in the communicational sequence of speech events. Her discussion is very detailed and exhaustive, richly illustrated with interesting examples. Borowska also highlights the differences between native and non-native speakers of English when it comes to the genesis of misunderstandings, which is later used as a basis for divergent paths of training proposed for the former and the latter in chapter six. Of particular interest is here also a survey of those forms and immanent features of the English language which are likely to generate communication problems: the Author argues for their exclusion from *Aeronautical English* in favor of those which are not burdened with potential ambiguity, vagueness or hazardous similarity to other items with which they could easily be confused. This is yet another methodological postulate which lies at the basis of Borowska's concept of training presented in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter six (pp. 219–249), as mentioned above, is devoted mainly to the presentation of Borowska's ideas regarding the system of training in civil aviation, stemming from the most important objective of *avialinguistics*; improvement of communication. On the basis of all considerations presented earlier and the official recommendations pertaining to the use of language in aviation-related radio communication, the Author formulates detailed instructions vis-à-vis the organization and implementation of language training of candidates for civil aviation service. Exploiting the general framework of ESP course development the Author points to all factors which must be taken into consideration in preparing courses for future pilots and ATC staff. Such issues as needs analysis, participants, expected skills to be developed, teaching staff requirements and the methods of teaching are discussed in a detailed manner. The focal point is the divergent treatment of native and non-native speakers of English and the extensive use of simulations in order to develop the skills necessary for effective communication in the future situations when human

life can be at stake. All these methodological postulates stem from Borowska's invaluable expertise in the field of aeronautical communication and are well grounded in the literature on the subject.

Further support for the postulates included in chapter six is provided in chapter seven (pp. 251–282), where the results of Borowska's survey on aeronautical communication practice are presented. The author constructed a detailed questionnaire (to be found in the Appendix) and managed to receive responses from as many as 290 civil aviation professionals (pilots and ATC staff) from 59 countries. It is the first survey in which native and non-native speakers of English communicating with the use of *Aeronautical English* were evaluated separately. In spite of the fact that the way in which some of the questions were asked could result in a certain bias in the answers provided, Borowska managed to collect impressive material for analysis. Especially the examples quoted by the respondents turned out to be very valuable in the context of *Aviation English* course development. For example, one of the air traffic controllers pointed to the tendency of Asian (especially Chinese) pilots to confirm comprehension of ATC tower commands in situations when the message was not properly understood—the evidence for miscomprehension was the behavior of the pilots. This might stem from the culture-specific strategy of face loss avoidance: the Chinese pilots fear that admitting lack of comprehension disqualifies them as competent professionals. Such remarks and examples, extensively quoted in chapter seven, are very helpful in the formulation of concrete methodological postulates related to the content and focus of training. It seems that many of the postulates presented in chapter six were in fact based on the results of the survey, although the Author does not admit it directly. Such ordering of the chapters might disturb the perception of the book content a little, but the connections are easily traceable and clear.

The book as a whole constitutes an interesting piece of reading both for linguists interested in specialized registers and for people responsible for course development and ESP training. Most importantly, however, it should be recommended to those ICAO experts who are in charge of the organization of training for future pilots and ATC staff, because implementation of Borowska's recommendations is, in my opinion, bound to bring significant improvement in the effectiveness of aeronautical communication. A direct consequence of such improvement is higher safety of aircraft passengers, which means our safety, because it would be hard to find nowadays someone who has never been in such a role.

References

- Cook, G. (2011). Discourse analysis. In J. Simpson (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 431–444). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Schiffrin, D. (1994). *Approaches to discourse*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Adam Wojtaszek
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland