Evaluating Textbooks for Brazilian Air Traffic Controllers' English Language Training: A Checklist Proposal

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Abstract : English language proficiency has become an essential issue in aviation communication after aviation incidents, and accidents happened. Lack of proficiency or inappropriate use of the English language has been found as one of the factors that cause most of those incidents or accidents. Therefore, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) established the requirements for minimum English language proficiency of aviation personnel, especially pilots and air traffic controllers in the 192 member states. In Brazil, the discussions about this topic became patent after an accident that occurred in 2006, which was a mid-air collision and costed the life of 154 passengers and crew members. Thus, the number of schools and private practitioners willing to teach English for aviation purposes started to increase. Although the number of teaching materials internationally used for general purposes is relatively large, it would be inappropriate to adopt the same materials in classes that focus on communication in aviation contexts. On the contrary, the options of aviation English materials are scarce; moreover, they are internationally used and may not fulfill the linguistic needs of all their users around the world. In order to diminish the problems that Brazilian practitioners may encounter in the adoption of materials that demand a great level of adaptation to meet their students' needs, a checklist was thought to evaluate textbooks. The aim of this paper is to propose a checklist that evaluates textbooks used in English language training of Brazilian air traffic controllers. The criteria used to compound the checklist are based on materials development literature, as well as on linguistic requirements established by ICAO on its publications, on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) principles, and on Brazilian aviation English language proficiency test format. The checklist has as main indicators the language learning tenets under which the book was written, graphical features, lexical, grammatical and functional competencies required for minimum proficiency, similarities to official testing format, and support materials, totaling 117 items marked as YES, NO or PARTIALLY. In order to verify if the use of the checklist is effective, an aviation English textbook was evaluated. From this evaluation, it is possible to measure quantitatively how much the material meets the students' needs and to offer a tool to help professionals engaged in aviation English teaching around the world to choose the most appropriate textbook according to their audience. From the results, practitioners are able to verify which items the material does not fulfill and to make proper adaptations since the perfect material will be difficult to find.

Keywords : aviation English, ICAO, materials development, English language proficiency
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