

**PHILIP SHAWCROSS, *FlightPath: Aviation English for Pilots and ATCOs.***

Cambridge University Press: Cambridge (UK), 2011. ISBN: 9780521178716 <sup>1</sup>

Review by Aline Pacheco<sup>2</sup>

Flightpath, by Philip Shawcross, is a modern upper-intermediate course book ultimately intended to contribute to the enhancement of safety in aviation.

As the author well puts from the very beginning of the book, it aims at helping learners on how to perform communicative tasks in non-routine and unexpected operational situations, broadening the scope of language to be learned in aviation English: Flightpath focuses on the teaching of plain English –applied for the aviation context, joining together standard phraseology - supposedly learned before. An instance of this perspective is clearly shown in unit 1, where students are constantly asked to reflect upon the difference between phraseology and plain language by performing different kinds of tasks.

The first impressions one can get by browsing the book are doubtless: its dense layout, highlighted by the display of realistic materials such as flight charts from Jeppesen and pictures of real airliners, can drive us to a concise and solid concept of the material.

Although the book takes into consideration the language required for ICAO standards to comply with the tests, it is not meant to prepare learners for any examination. In other words, even though it is designed to help learners reach ICAO level 4 (the standard level of English agreed internationally), it is not centered on specific test development tasks. Unlike other books in the field, Flightpath is primarily supposed to ensure linguistic competence of the skills that are required for professionals of aviation.

As for its structure, the book has ten units distributed into an introduction and three thematic parts. Part A focuses on Hazard on the ground and comprises units 2, 3 and 4, each with its related topic, namely ground movements, communication on the ground and runway incursions. Part B is entitled En-route, and encompasses unit 5 – Environmental threats, unit 6- Level busts, and unit 7- Decision making. Part C deals with approach and landing and includes units 8, 9 and 10, which are about approach and landing incidents, handling a technical malfunction and

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reducing approach and landing risks, respectively. For each of the parts, there is a review section emphasizing aspects such as pronunciation, structure and vocabulary.

The units are firstly presented in a syllabus organized in operational topics, communication functions and language content. Every unit has a very similar inner structure, pointing out at issues which are quite relevant to the field and proving the commitment of the author to his main goal when writing the book, namely “to enable learners to interact fluently and effectively in aviation communication” (Teacher’s Book, p5<sup>3</sup>).

There are “lead-in” sentences, with real quotes by pilots, controllers or aviation professionals. Also, throughout the unit, similar statements – displayed in a chart entitled as “ICAO focus” - are highlighted in order to drive learners to a reflection about issues that are likely to be confusing. In a section called “Communication Errors”, the author brings up possible problems about each topic that is being dealt with at that point, so to warn students before any misleading conceptions. Straightforward role-play activities are offered as well, which are clear for learners to perform because they are mostly based on “information gap” principles.

A major communication task called “Putting it together” usually ends the unit. It is intended to join together all the skills that have been worked along the unit in one exercise. Yet interesting, the activity has to be very carefully planned, so that the goals are actually achieved. The teacher has to be very attentive to target language and performance of students for they might get a bit lost if misguided.

One aspect that should be pointed out is the concern with the learner’s understanding of an idea by himself. That is, we can spot a number of tasks that are filled with carefully elaborated leading questions in order to guide students to a concept to be built by themselves. Likewise, there are practical and short “progress check” sections at the very end of each unit, so that students can monitor their own learning. Although the author does not clearly state this, it is obviously relevant for fostering the general notion of autonomous learning, so discussed and necessary these days.

As for the listening activities, they range from a variety of tasks: matching, identification, response-making, reading back, all of them based on air transmissions or other communication situations related to the activity of flying. However, the audios could sound more authentic and genuine. Firstly, they are quite slow. Secondly, about the sound itself: along the class CDs, we get to find only a few tracks with a genuine background sound which is very common in the

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<sup>3</sup> SHAWCROSS, P & DAY, J. Flighpath: Aviation English for Pilots and ATCOs, Teacher’s Book. Cambridge University press, Cambridge (UK), 2011. SBN:9780521178709.

aviation context of communication. Moreover, the texts are not mostly dialogues. That is, apart from isolated sentences, texts are “story-telling” type, so that students have to pick information about a situation from a story that is being told, not from an event that is actually taking place. One may say standard phraseology has never been the focus of the author, so this may be why he is not primarily concerned with an outstanding authenticity of the audios. In spite of this possible argument, we understand the soundtracks could be improved.

A DVD supplementary material also provides extra activities carefully designed to focus the attention of the learner on the most important points. The videos are said to be based on very real incidents so to promote more serious discussion and reflection safety wise.

A website supports the material, with a 36-page aviation Glossary, case studies and interviews with experts in the field. Nevertheless, there are no online exercises, which may drive teachers and students to resort to other kinds of material for further practice.

The Teacher’s Book, along with the pack, enriches the material mainly for supplying the necessary background for less experienced professionals in the aviation field. There are “background notes” for nearly all the activities, suggested answers, guidance for the performance of the tasks as well as a list of relevant sources for the teacher to conduct classes with some of the expertise that ESP courses require.

However, test-packs are not offered. This may be a problem mainly for students, who will eventually have to apply for examinations based on tasks that might not follow the same lines of the activities they have been exposed to along the course. In addition, there is no workbook. This kind of material would be very helpful in order to supply learners with exercises, especially those students who are not so confident about their learning process.

Flightpath would be suggested for a course with a minimum of 180 hours, so that it could be thoroughly used. Learners who have not reached at least an intermediate level of English may not profit from everything the book has to offer, since it is not recommended for students without a solid linguistic background.

Also, for the reason it provides so many activities exploring so many different issues – yet relevant, it can be too dense at times. That is, teachers are supposed to carefully prepare their classes counting on the availability of time so that students do not feel overloaded with so many tasks at once.