



LET

Departamento de Letras e Artes da Cena

Pós-Graduação Lato Sensu em Língua Inglesa

ALINE MANSO DE BARROS

**ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND TRAINING IN AVIATION: A CRITICAL LOOK  
INTO ICAO DOC 9835**

Rio de Janeiro  
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CRÍTICO SOBRE O DOC 9835 DA OACI**

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Monografia apresentada ao Departamento de Letras e Artes da Cena da PUC-Rio como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de especialista em Língua Inglesa.

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## ABSTRACT

In recent decades, Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) has emerged as a compelling framework for examining language education through a sociopolitical lens. This paper explores how principles from both CAL and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) can inform and enrich language training in aviation, particularly in relation to the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) Doc 9835. Drawing on classroom reflections, theoretical perspectives, and the lived realities of aviation professionals, this qualitative study critically examines how standardized language assessments may overlook the complexities of identity, culture, and context. Rooted in a desire to humanize language education and promote inclusive communicative practices, the study brings into focus the importance of local knowledge, co-constructed meaning, and situated pedagogical approaches in high-stakes learning environments. Rather than offering prescriptive solutions, the work aligns with CAL's emphasis on understanding, inviting educators to rethink the purposes and processes of language training in global aviation.

**Keywords:** Critical Applied Linguistics; English for Specific Purposes; Aviation English; ICAO Doc 9835.

## RESUMO

Nas últimas décadas, a Linguística Aplicada Crítica (LAC) tem se consolidado como uma abordagem relevante para analisar o ensino de línguas sob uma perspectiva sociopolítica. Este trabalho investiga como os princípios da LAC e do Inglês para Fins Específicos (IFE) podem contribuir para a formação linguística na aviação, com foco no Documento 9835 da Organização da Aviação Civil Internacional (OACI). A partir de reflexões de sala de aula, fundamentos teóricos e experiências vividas por profissionais da aviação, este estudo qualitativo analisa criticamente como avaliações padronizadas de proficiência linguística podem negligenciar aspectos como identidade, cultura e contexto. Ancorado no propósito de humanizar o ensino de línguas e promover práticas comunicativas inclusivas, o estudo destaca a importância do conhecimento local, da construção conjunta de sentido e de abordagens pedagógicas situadas em ambientes de aprendizagem de alta complexidade. Em vez de propor soluções prescritivas, o trabalho se alinha à proposta da LAC ao valorizar a compreensão crítica, convidando educadores a repensar os objetivos e os processos da formação linguística na aviação global.

**Palavras-chave:** Linguística Aplicada Crítica; Inglês para Fins Específicos; Inglês Aeronáutico; Doc 9835 da OACI.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

To ensure clear and efficient communication between pilots and air traffic controllers worldwide, a universal aviation language had to be established. English was chosen as the language of the skies at the 1944 Chicago Convention (Convention on International Civil Aviation - Doc 7300). However, it wasn't until September 1998 that the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) began addressing language proficiency for pilots and air traffic controllers, as a direct response to the fatal accidents caused in part by a lack of English proficiency. Today, English language skills are widely recognized as an essential element for operational safety in international aviation, highlighting the need for improved communication between aviation professionals. Despite this, implementing this global requirement has brought significant challenges such as the different accents and other external factors during emergency situations for those whose native language is not English.

This decision aimed to mitigate risks associated with accidents caused by linguistic misunderstandings. A notable example is the Avianca Flight 52 accident in 1990 in which the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) determined that the crash occurred due to the flight crew failing to properly declare a fuel emergency. Cases like this highlight the need for clear and comprehensible language, even in high-pressure or emergency situations. In this context, our training and language assessment need to account for the specificities of Brazilians and their mother tongue.

The training and language assessment of aviation professionals have been the focus of ongoing studies and development. In Brazil, this responsibility is carried out by the Instituto de Controle do Espaço Aéreo (ICEA)<sup>1</sup>, which plans, develops, and implements training and evaluation tools to ensure compliance with ICAO standards. Furthermore, as a scientific and technological institution, ICEA is tasked with promoting research and development related to Brazilian airspace control. Aligned with this mission, ICEA hosts the Grupo de Estudos de Inglês Aeronáutico (GEIA)<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> Instituto de Controle do Espaço Aéreo (ICEA): Brazilian Airspace Control Institute responsible for research, development, and training in airspace management and air traffic control. The acronym is used in Portuguese.

<sup>2</sup> Grupo de Estudos de Inglês Aeronáutico (GEIA): study group of aviation professionals focused on English for aeronautical communication. The acronym GEIA does not have an official translation and is used in its original Portuguese form.

an initiative created in 2013 and led by an English language professional Prof. Dr. Patrícia Tosqui Lucks, whose work includes developing teaching materials, courses (both in-person and online), assessments, and proficiency exams. GEIA brings together researchers from various organizations from the Brazilian Air Force and from different parts of the world to study aspects related to language description, teaching, learning, and assessment of aeronautical English with the goal of improving safety. As an air traffic controller, I had the opportunity to attend lectures and learn more about how language affects communication in aviation.

Although ICAO's standard phraseology provides a solid foundation for communication, the unpredictability of events such as technical failures, adverse weather conditions, and medical emergencies requires additional linguistic competencies. GEIA focuses its efforts on analyzing linguistic interactions in radiotelephony communications, particularly in non-routine and emergency situations that demand a more flexible and adaptive use of language, reinforcing the importance of sharing knowledge that goes beyond the mechanical learning of technical terms, incorporating broader communicative skills adapted to the Brazilian context.

In this regard, GEIA also focuses on analyzing educational materials for aviation professionals and describing tools for assessing language proficiency. The results of its research have contributed to the development of more effective courses and assessments, ensuring that Brazilian professionals are well-prepared to perform their duties with excellence and safety.

A very cited document in GEIA and in the aviation English classes I attended is ICAO's Doc 9835<sup>3</sup> which establishes global standards for English proficiency. This manual provides detailed guidance on training and assessment requirements for pilots and air traffic controllers. It also introduces a language proficiency scale that serves as a benchmark for aviation regulatory agencies worldwide. However, the practical application of this document in the Brazilian context still requires further investigation, as local demands are not always fully addressed, and there are gaps in understanding these guidelines.

Due to that, my research originated from insights and questions raised during presentations I attended as part of my participation in GEIA meetings. Although

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<sup>3</sup> Official document available at:

<https://skybrary.aero/sites/default/files/bookshelf/2497.pdf>. Accessed on: July 5, 2025.

several studies on aeronautical English already exist, in Brazil, there has not yet been much focus on analyzing ICAO Doc 9835's chapter 7 (LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TRAINING). This chapter provides general guidance on training pilots and controllers with a view to demonstrating compliance with ICAO language proficiency requirements. These guidelines remain subject to many different interpretations. Based on my practical experience as an air traffic controller, I felt the need to explore how this manual, which guides global language proficiency requirements, can be adapted to meet the specific needs of the Brazilian context I've been a part of. I aim to offer a critical and contextualized perspective because as an applied linguistics student, I believe that, while international standards like Doc 9835 are essential, they are not always enough on their own. It's important to consider local demands and specific contextual factors to ensure that language training and communication in aviation are more responsive to the realities and needs of the professionals involved.

By analyzing this chapter through the lens of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL), I aim to connect its content with my experience as an air traffic controller. By doing so, I will not only demonstrate a deeper understanding of language training within the aviation context, but also align the chapter's key themes with real-world practices in air traffic control. This will allow me to critically assess the relevance of the training concepts to my professional experience and the language proficiency needs of aviation professionals.

This monograph is organized into six main chapters. Following Chapter 1 (Introduction), Chapter 2 — “English: A Vital Skill for the Globalized World and Aviation” — presents the theoretical background related to Aviation English, with a focus on English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Chapter 3 — “Rethinking Language Training in Aviation through the Lens of Critical Applied Linguistics” — expands the discussion by introducing the principles of Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL), proposing a more reflective and contextualized approach to language education. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological framework of the study, highlighting its qualitative nature and the use of classroom reflections and professional experience as sources of analysis. Chapter 5 presents a critical analysis of Chapter 7 of ICAO Doc 9835, connecting its content with the Brazilian context and the lived experiences of aviation professionals. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the main findings and reflects on the implications for language training in aviation.

## 2. English: A Vital Skill for the Globalized World and Aviation

English is widely recognized as a global language, a status previously held by Latin (Ostler, 2006) and French (Hagège, 2012). Holden (2009, p. 13) describes English as the primary example of a global language today, highlighting its role in facilitating communication across diverse fields such as science, technology, the arts, and professional industries. Its influence extends beyond formal education, shaping career prospects and international interactions.

Motivations for learning English generally fall into four interconnected categories: educational, professional, integrative (for social interaction), and recreational (for leisure and travel). In many cases, multiple factors drive individuals to acquire English skills. According to Gardner (1985, p. 10), motivation in language learning "refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language." He further classifies these motivations into "integrative" and "instrumental" categories, where integrative motivations involve the desire to connect with others and assimilate into a new culture, and instrumental motivations reflect the practical benefits of acquiring a skill, such as advancing one's career or academic aspirations.

Still according to Gardner (1985), both types of motivation play significant roles in determining the intensity and success of language learning efforts, depending on the learner's personal context and goals. Similarly, a study by Ushioda (2013) suggests that learners' motivations are often multifaceted, where personal, professional, and social aspirations intermingle to drive language acquisition. In particular, the British Council (2013) highlights that language learners often pursue English for a combination of reasons, with many students motivated by the need to use English in academic contexts and the desire for social interaction in global communities. Additionally, Cambridge English (2017) emphasizes that recreational motivations, such as travel or leisure activities, are also a common driver for individuals seeking to improve their English skills, further illustrating the broad range of motivations behind language learning.

The significance of English in professional settings is frequently emphasized in media, particularly in job-related publications and business-focused platforms. For example, a report by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2018) found that 60% of global executives believe English proficiency is crucial for expanding their businesses and increasing international market share. This broad relevance of English in the modern world emphasizes its importance not only for professional development but also for individuals' personal growth. In today's interconnected world, acquiring English language skills enables individuals to access better job opportunities, participate in global conversations, and engage with a wide range of cultural and intellectual content.

As English continues to dominate global industries, the need for specialized language instruction has become increasingly evident. General English proficiency, while valuable, may not fully equip learners for the specific demands of their professions or academic disciplines. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) addresses this gap by focusing on the precise linguistic and communicative needs of learners in specialized fields such as aviation, medicine, business, and engineering.

ESP is a teaching approach in which all decisions regarding content and methodology are based on learners' specific reasons for studying the language (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19). Unlike General English, which broadly develops linguistic skills, ESP ensures that instruction is relevant and aligned with professional or academic requirements (Johns & Price-Machado, 2001). Two key concepts define this approach: necessity and specificity. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), necessity refers to the idea that students learn English to meet communication needs within their professional or academic contexts. For example, air traffic controllers must master aviation-specific vocabulary and standardized communication protocols to ensure safety and clarity in international operations (ICAO, 2010). Specificity, as emphasized by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), focuses on tailoring instruction to the distinct language demands of a particular field, ensuring that learners develop. Needs analysis is a fundamental aspect of ESP, as it determines what learners must be able to do with English in their specific contexts. Dudley-Evans (2004, p. 131) stresses its importance, stating that effective ESP instruction begins with understanding learners' real-world communicative goals. For instance, medical professionals require English tailored to medical terminology and patient interactions, while engineers need proficiency in technical documentation and workplace

discussions. By addressing these specific needs, ESP enables professionals to communicate effectively in their fields, enhancing both their career prospects and their contributions to global industries. The focus on real-world applications highlights the crucial role of ESP in bridging the gap between language learning and professional success.

This means that learning is directly related to the intended use of the language. As Vilaça (2003, p. 57) explains: "The goal of ESP is to prepare students to use the language as a tool for completing specific tasks they need to perform". Unlike General English, which aims to develop a broad range of linguistic competencies, ESP prioritizes specific skills and knowledge based on learners' professional or academic needs. It is not a teaching method, such as grammar-translation or the audiolingual approach, but rather a learner-centered and needs-driven teaching approach. Identifying learners' needs plays a central role in ESP, ensuring that instruction is practical and directly applicable to real-world situations.

To ensure that instruction aligns with these needs, conducting a comprehensive and careful needs analysis becomes essential. This process helps guide the development of courses, assessments, teaching materials, and even contributes to the training of ESP instructors. Needs analysis is a dynamic, continuous, broad, and multifaceted process that allows learners' or test-takers' needs to be identified, categorized, and evaluated (Silva, 2016a, 2016b). Vian Jr. (2008, p. 143) further clarifies the role of needs analysis: "Needs analysis is the key factor that distinguishes instrumental language teaching from general language teaching. This does not mean that students in general language courses do not have needs; rather, in instrumental courses, learners are usually more aware of their specific needs." By focusing on learners' real-world requirements, needs analysis ensures that ESP instruction is targeted, relevant, and effective for professional communication. By focusing on learners' specific needs, ESP ensures that English language education is practical and effective, preparing individuals to use the language as a tool for success in their academic and professional lives.

In Brazil, this practical, goal-oriented approach is often referred to as "Instrumental English," emphasizing its role as a tool for achieving specific objectives. Courses labeled as "Technical English" also fall within the ESP framework, focusing on the direct application of English in professional settings. In fields such as aviation,

where precise communication can be a matter of life or death (Riordan, 2018, p. 24), ESP plays an even more critical role. The evolution of Aviation English, closely tied to the history of aviation itself, underscores the importance of effective communication for safety. In these high-stakes environments, needs analysis ensures that the language instruction is tailored to meet the specific demands of the profession, making it vital for both effective learning and real-world application.

This connection between language and aviation dates back to humanity's earliest attempts at a flight and has evolved through wars and space exploration. However, English—now the lingua franca of aviation—did not always hold this status.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, major world powers experienced a period of intense intellectual activity, creating the perfect conditions for the first works on aviation to emerge. During this early period, French played a dominant role as the primary source of aviation terminology.

Consequently, most aviation-related publications from this era were written in French, an example is the "Aeronautique et Astronautique" magazine, first published in the early 20th century, primarily aiming to document and standardize the evolving aeronautical vocabulary, while seeking equivalent terms in other major languages. French was the dominant language for technical and operational communication in aviation during this period, largely due to France's early leadership in aviation development. But as Eaton (2009) notes, the dominance of French in the aviation lexicon began to wane as Germany, England, and the United States emerged as key players in the field of aviation. Maci (2015) expands on this by pointing out that the rise of these nations, with their increasing technological advances and political influence, led to the gradual establishment of their own aviation terminologies. As these countries became global powers, their language began to take precedence.

After World War II, the number of excess aircraft and pilots was even higher than after World War I, leading to the rapid expansion and internationalization of commercial aviation. In 1940, American airlines transported around two million passengers per year on 350 aircraft. By 1950, these numbers had surged to approximately 17 million passengers on over 1,000 aircraft (Crystal, 1997, p. 98).

As international air travel expanded, the need for a common aviation language became increasingly evident. English was the obvious choice, given that the leaders of the Allied forces, the dominant aircraft manufacturers, and the majority of post-war

pilots spoke the language (Crystal, 1997, p. 99). This decision was formalized with the creation of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 1944.

Responsible for establishing regulations and standards for safety, efficiency, and regularity in air transport across its 190-member states, ICAO recommended in 1951 that English should be used between pilots and air traffic controllers who spoke different native languages.

In Brazil, the MCA 100-16/2016 regulation (Brasil, 2016a, item 2.4) establishes Portuguese as the primary language for aeronautical communications within Brazilian airspace. However, it aligns with ICAO standards by designating English as the mandatory international language for radiotelephony communication beyond Brazilian airspace.

The term Aviation English is still evolving among Brazilian scholars, with various definitions and perspectives being explored. The Aeronautical English Study Group (GEIA), as mentioned in the introductory paragraph, defines Aviation English as: "the language used in communications occurring during a flight in an international setting, specifically between pilots and air traffic controllers" (GEIA, online). Brazilian scholars, such as Carvalho (2012) and Santos (2018), have expanded on this definition, examining the role of linguistic competence in promoting safety in aviation. Carvalho, for instance, discusses the challenges of language barriers in aviation communication and advocates for the development of specific language training tailored to Brazilian aviation professionals. Santos, on the other hand, investigates how Aviation English is incorporated into Brazilian air traffic control training programs, emphasizing the importance of standardized phraseology to minimize misunderstandings and ensure efficient communication. These scholars contribute to a growing body of work in Brazil that seeks to understand the nuances of Aviation English and its practical applications in the global aviation industry.

As aviation expanded, concerns about communication-related safety issues grew. A tragic example of this occurred on March 27, 1977, when aviation history witnessed its deadliest accident in Tenerife, Canary Islands. Due to miscommunication between pilots and air traffic controllers, two Boeing 747s collided, resulting in 583 fatalities. The Tenerife disaster and other similar incidents highlighted the critical role of clear and standardized communication in aviation. Poor language comprehension was identified as a contributing factor in many accidents, reinforcing

the need for strict linguistic protocols and training to enhance safety in global aviation.

Following multiple aviation accidents and incidents in the 1970s and 1990s, inadequate English proficiency among pilots and air traffic controllers (ATCOs) was identified as a contributing factor in miscommunications. In response, ICAO introduced regulatory measures to standardize English proficiency requirements in civil aviation (Monteiro, 2010). Specialists viewed the simplification and standardization of communication between pilots and air traffic controllers as the best strategy to prevent accidents. Borowska (2018) argues that, since no individual can master all languages, Aeronautical English—which she calls—is essential for ensuring safe communication among users of shared airspace.

Despite these standardization efforts, accidents continued to occur. No matter how extensive phraseology may be, it does not cover all situations that may arise in the cockpit, especially during urgent or emergency moments. Furthermore, some pilots and controllers still disregard it. Thus, contrary to what some specialists believe, preventing accidents requires more than just simplifying and standardizing the language used between pilots and air traffic controllers; pilots must also be proficient in what experts refer to as plain language. As Scaramucci (2011a, p. 10) clarifies, this is not the same English used for daily activities like shopping or going to the movies. Instead, it follows strict rules of precision, clarity, objectivity, and lack of ambiguity, similar to phraseology. Because of this, Estival and Farris (2016, p. 17) describe "plain English" as a "linguistic fiction" while Scaramucci et al. (2018, p. 300) suggest that the term should be translated as "common English" specifically within the context of aviation communication.

Recognizing this, ICAO published the Manual on the Implementation of Language Proficiency Requirements (Doc 9835) in 2004, later updated in 2010. This document defines aviation-specific language and highlights the necessity of "plain English" in exceptional situations where standard phraseology is inadequate, it also emphasizes that while standard phraseology is the primary mode of communication, proficiency in plain English is essential for handling non-routine situations. This reinforces the idea that Aviation English is not just about memorizing set phrases but developing the ability to communicate effectively under pressure.

Given this need, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) plays a crucial role in equipping learners with the linguistic and professional competencies necessary to

navigate the complexities of globalized industries. By focusing on the social, cultural, and professional dimensions of communication, ESP fosters safety, efficiency, and equity, particularly in high-stakes fields such as aviation. The integration of authentic materials and real-world simulations ensures that learners engage with language in meaningful, practical contexts, enhancing their confidence and professional competence.

As transformative educators, we must approach ESP instruction with a dual focus: not only teaching language skills but also empowering learners to become competent professionals. This means considering both industry-specific communication demands and students' individual needs, ensuring that courses are reflective, adaptable, and relevant to their academic and career goals. By addressing these aspects, we can create meaningful learning experiences that support students in developing the skills necessary for their professional success.

To achieve this, the use of learner feedback and reflective tools is vital in refining instructional strategies, ensuring that materials are relevant, authentic, and culturally appropriate. By critically evaluating teaching resources, such as aviation ESP textbooks, we can determine whether they effectively simulate real-world interactions, such as pilot-ATC dialogues, and align with the communicative demands of the profession.

From a critical perspective, I see that ESP has the potential to either empower or marginalize learners, depending on how it is designed and implemented. As I explore this field, I recognize the importance of ensuring inclusivity and ethical considerations in course development to avoid creating barriers to effective communication and professional growth. Taking an exploratory approach to ESP research could help uncover real-world challenges, such as communication difficulties in aviation, while also fostering a more collaborative learning environment where students actively engage as co-researchers, shaping their own educational journey.

Ultimately, ESP instruction must go beyond simple language teaching; it should cultivate a holistic learning experience that prepares learners to meet the demands of their professions with confidence and competence. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987) argue, ESP should be tailored to the specific needs of learners, emphasizing the importance of authenticity in both the materials and contexts used in teaching. This approach promotes a deeper engagement with the language and

practices of the profession. By aligning instruction with real-world professional contexts, ESP educators can foster a meaningful connection to the learners' future careers (Belcher, 2009; Flowerdew; Peacock, 2001). Furthermore, inclusivity is essential in ensuring that all learners, regardless of their background or specific professional focus, have equal access to the resources they need to succeed (Gillett; Wainwright, 2016). By embracing these principles, ESP educators contribute not only to linguistic proficiency but also to the broader goal of reasonable and effective professional communication in a globalized world (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

In summary, the effectiveness of ESP instruction depends on the ability to critically analyze teaching materials for relevance, authenticity, and cultural appropriateness, ensuring they align with learners' professional goals (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). As an air traffic controller with a deep interest in aviation, I believe that it's essential to continuously refine instructional strategies, particularly by engaging with resources like Doc 9835, to maintain relevance to the industry's evolving needs (ICAO, 2010). By embracing an inclusive approach, educators can provide a more impactful learning experience that supports the development of both linguistic proficiency and real-world professional competence (Gillett & Wainwright, 2016). Ultimately, ESP must serve as a bridge between language learning and practical application, empowering learners to navigate their respective industries with confidence and competence (Belcher, 2009).

### 3. Rethinking Language Training in Aviation through the Lens of Critical Applied Linguistics

Taking into account the theme of this monograph and, unlike the prescriptive methodologies that dominated much of the twentieth century, Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) emerges as an approach that transcends traditional language teaching and research practices, encouraging critical reflection on the social, political, and educational structures that influence language learning, as well as other investigative contexts such as language policy and planning (Tollefson, 1991), identity and subjectivity in language education (Norton, 2000; Moita Lopes, 2006), critical pedagogy (Pennycook, 2001), and multilingual practices in postcolonial settings (Canagarajah, 1999). CAL challenges the notion that language learning can be entirely standardized, proposing instead a more fluid, plural, and inclusive understanding of educational practice. Influenced by social movements and by the necessity to question power structures and inequalities, CAL becomes a crucial tool for those seeking to promote a more just and transformative education grounded in a critical understanding of social realities. In this regard, key directions in Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) —as discussed by Allwright (2006), Pennycook (2001), Rajagopalan (2003), and Moita Lopes (2006, 2013) — aim to understand how this field contributes to inclusive and conscious educational development, particularly in the context of aviation. CAL challenges the notion that language learning can be entirely standardized, proposing instead a more fluid, plural, and inclusive approach to educational practices.

Influenced by social movements that question power structures and inequalities, CAL becomes a crucial tool for those seeking to promote a more just and transformative education grounded in a critical understanding of social realities. This paper explores key directions in CAL, based on works by Allwright (2006), Pennycook (2001), Rajagopalan (2003), and Moita Lopes (2006, 2013), with the goal of understanding how it contributes to inclusive and conscious educational development, especially in the context of aviation.

Initially, Applied Linguistics was marked by a prescriptive orientation, especially during the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, where the focus was on

identifying the most efficient method for language instruction. The goal was to accelerate language acquisition, often through behaviorist and structuralist frameworks, without adequately considering the complexity of individual learners or the broader sociopolitical context. Research emphasized measurable outcomes and efficiency, with little attention to power relations, identity, or inequality.

Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, this paradigm began to shift as scholars like Allwright (2006) advocated for a more reflective, practitioner-centered approach that acknowledged the dynamic and negotiated nature of classroom interactions. Within this broader movement, Critical Applied Linguistics (Pennycook, 2001) emerged as a response to the technicist and depoliticized tendencies of mainstream applied linguistics, rejecting universal solutions and emphasizing the importance of localized, context-sensitive analyses rooted in the lived experiences of teachers and learners, while also foregrounding issues of ideology, power, and social justice.

CAL signifies a fundamental shift from the search for definitive, technical answers to an orientation that values understanding as an educational goal in itself. While not directly associated with Critical Applied Linguistics, Allwright (2006) argues that language education should be concerned not only with improving outcomes but also with deepening our understanding of the pedagogical practices and social meanings embedded in classroom life. His approach, known as Exploratory Practice, encourages teachers and learners to become co-investigators of their own practices, emphasizing mutual reflection and meaning-making. Similarly, CAL views teaching and learning as socially co-constructed processes in which both teachers and students are active participants, shaped by broader ideological, cultural, and institutional forces. Rather than treating classrooms as neutral spaces, CAL foregrounds the importance of critical engagement with power, identity, and discourse in educational contexts.

Instead of simplifying educational phenomena, Critical Applied Linguistics seeks to embrace their inherent complexity, recognizing that pedagogical environments are embedded within broader socio political and cultural dynamics. Fabrício (2006) underscores that classrooms—particularly in the context of increasingly globalized and plural societies—are not homogeneous or static. They are dynamic spaces where multiple identities intersect, ideologies are negotiated, and meanings are constantly (re)constructed. This perspective is especially relevant to this research, which examines English language teaching in the aviation field—a

domain often governed by rigid norms, safety protocols, and the expectation of linguistic standardization. While such protocols are vital for operational clarity, CAL encourages us to interrogate how these structures may inadvertently marginalize learners by overlooking their local experiences, linguistic repertoires, and subjectivities. Embracing Fabrício's (2006) view of classrooms as contested sites of meaning-making allows this investigation to situate aviation English instruction not only as a technical training task but also as a deeply human, socially charged process. In this light, language education becomes a space for inclusion, reflection, and transformation—even within fields that demand high levels of precision and control.

Rather than seeking universal solutions, Critical Applied Linguistics proposes the need for ongoing critical reflection, situated in the realities of specific contexts. The goal is not to provide definitive solutions, but to foster deeper understanding of the complex, often unequal, conditions under which language teaching and learning occur. In this sense, Rajagopalan (2006) argues that educational processes cannot be dissociated from the sociocultural and ideological positions of those involved. For him, recognizing the plural and contested nature of identity, language, and knowledge is essential to resisting pedagogical models that reduce learners to passive recipients and teachers to mere transmitters of pre-established content.

This line of thought is especially pertinent to this research, which examines how language education in the aviation field—an environment that prioritizes safety, clarity, and regulatory compliance—tends to rely on standardization and depersonalization as guiding principles. While these aspects serve operational goals, they may also obscure the subjective, social, and local dimensions of language use. Thinking through Rajagopalan's perspective, it becomes evident that a truly inclusive and effective pedagogical model in aviation must go beyond linguistic correctness or procedural efficiency. It must also engage critically with learners' backgrounds, question whose norms are being privileged, and consider how institutional discourses shape what is considered "correct," "safe," or "professional" communication.

As a researcher engaged in this field, I align with this critical stance because it allows for a more ethical, situated, and humanized approach to language education—one that not only meets technical demands but also respects and incorporates the lived experiences of learners. This position contributes to a broader reimaging of what it means to teach and learn English in high-stakes professional

domains, challenging the assumptions that often go unquestioned in institutional documents and policies, such as those promoted by international regulatory bodies.

Building on this perspective, CAL shifts the focus away from a narrow emphasis on precision and performance metrics and instead advocates for learning environments that value experimentation, collaboration, and critical reflection. Within this framework, learners are not seen as passive recipients of content, but as active participants whose diverse learning styles and trajectories enrich the classroom dynamic and contribute meaningfully to pedagogical processes.

In line with this reorientation, CAL foregrounds well-being as a fundamental component of educational success. Allwright (2006) emphasizes that the mental health and emotional safety of both learners and teachers must be prioritized, as these conditions are essential for fostering sustained engagement and meaningful learning. A healthy educational environment is not ancillary but central to developing long-term linguistic competence and critical awareness.

Equally important in the CAL framework is the call for a more integrated relationship between theory and practice. Moita Lopes (2006) argues that academic theorizing should not be separated from classroom realities; instead, theory must emerge from practice and respond to it. Teachers and learners, in this view, are co-theorizers—agents capable of constructing knowledge collectively based on their lived experiences, needs, and institutional contexts.

This integrated, critical orientation finds fertile ground in the context of aviation language training, particularly when examined alongside the International Civil Aviation Organization's Doc 9835. While this document establishes global standards for linguistic proficiency (Level 4 and above) to promote operational safety, its technocratic approach tends to overlook the broader educational and sociocultural dimensions that shape communication in real-world aviation contexts. CAL does not reject the importance of technical accuracy but invites a more nuanced reading of what effective communication entails.

By bringing attention to sociocultural, identity-based, and contextual dimensions often neglected in highly standardized communication environments, CAL prompts me, in this research, to raise critical questions: Are aviation language training programs genuinely addressing the real-world communicative practices and needs of aviation professionals? To what extent are these programs prepared to engage with the linguistic and cultural diversity of English users in global aviation?

These questions lie at the heart of this study, which does not seek to dismiss the technical demands of aviation discourse, but rather to expand the conversation to include the human, political, and situated aspects of language education—dimensions that are too often marginalized or silenced within regulatory frameworks.

This tension becomes particularly evident when considering the International Civil Aviation Organization's ICAO's Language Proficiency Requirements (LPRs), which focus on measurable components such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, comprehension, and interaction. While these elements are critical for ensuring clarity and operational safety, their standardized nature often overlooks the multilingual realities of aviation and may inadvertently marginalize legitimate varieties of English spoken by professionals around the world.

In this regard, Rajagopalan (2003) reminds us that language is never neutral—it is always situated within broader power relations. Evaluating language proficiency without acknowledging the legitimacy of global Englishes risks reinforcing linguistic hierarchies that privilege certain norms—often native-speaker-based—over others. This not only undermines the communicative competence of non-native English speakers, who represent the majority of aviation professionals, but also perpetuates inequities within a supposedly global and collaborative domain.

In light of these concerns, CAL urges us to look beyond technical compliance and narrow conceptions of linguistic accuracy, emphasizing instead broader communicative competence. This includes sociocultural awareness and the ability to negotiate meaning under pressure. From this perspective, effective communication in aviation is not about strictly adhering to standardized linguistic norms, but about engaging meaningfully in diverse and dynamic situations.

CAL also reinforces the importance of designing aviation English programs that reflect real-world experiences. Training programs should be based on local challenges, such as regional accents, interaction norms, and context-specific communication practices. Moita Lopes (2006) advocates for “theorizing from practice”, highlighting that professional realities, rather than abstract theories, should inform course content and pedagogy.

Although ICAO stresses the importance of “training contextualization,” CAL goes a step further by advocating for knowledge co-production, where aviation professionals become active pedagogical agents, not passive recipients of

prescriptive knowledge. This critical shift acknowledges the expertise of professionals in shaping the educational process, allowing for more nuanced and contextually relevant teaching.

Moreover, aviation English programs often emphasize exam performance and institutional standards, which can create linguistic anxiety and undermine learners' confidence and mental health. In this context, Allwright (2006) suggests that classroom well-being must be treated as seriously as language proficiency itself, asserting that a healthy learning environment is crucial for long-term success.

Finally, CAL calls for supportive, collaborative learning environments where errors are seen not as failures but as integral components of the learning process. This approach encourages learners to engage openly with their mistakes, fostering a more resilient and reflective approach to language learning in the high-pressure domain of aviation.

Applying Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) principles to aviation language training—particularly within the context of ICAO's Doc 9835—reveals significant tensions between standardization and diversity, efficiency and inclusion, as well as technical compliance and human experience. While ICAO's standards are essential for maintaining operational safety, CAL challenges us to look beyond the technical aspects of language proficiency and to address the complex sociocultural factors that shape the construction of dialogue in aviation contexts. The rigid, one-size-fits-all approach promoted by standardized assessments, which focuses solely on linguistic accuracy, can inadvertently overlook the nuanced ways in which aviation professionals interact and co-construct meaning in diverse environments.

Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) does not dismiss the imperative of safety in aviation; rather, it broadens the discourse by contesting the reduction of communicative practices to mere technical correctness. Following the insights of Pennycook (2001) and Moita Lopes (2006, 2013), CAL emphasizes that communication, especially in high-stakes domains like aviation, is a socially situated and negotiated process shaped by identities, power relations, and cultural histories. It foregrounds the emotional and sociocultural dimensions of language use, recognizing that aviation professionals, embedded in diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes, may not adhere uniformly to standardized linguistic norms but nonetheless demonstrate critical expertise in managing complex, dynamic situations. By humanizing language training and valorizing local knowledge and practices, CAL

advocates for an emancipatory and inclusive pedagogical approach that challenges dominant standardization ideologies and fosters equity, dialogue, and reflexivity within aviation education.

Moreover, CAL encourages a shift toward active professional participation, recognizing aviation workers as co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients of standardized training. By involving professionals in the pedagogical process, we promote an environment of collaboration and mutual respect. This participatory approach, in turn, fosters a deeper understanding of how language use in aviation is shaped by real-world contexts, both local and global.

Ultimately, integrating CAL into aviation language training offers a vision for an aviation sector that is not only safer but also more ethical, just, and representative of the diverse individuals who contribute to its functioning. By foregrounding the importance of identity, culture, and well-being, CAL moves us toward a more holistic understanding of communicative competence—one that transcends technical proficiency and embraces the complexities of human interaction in global aviation contexts.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

This research aims to critically analyze Chapter 7 of ICAO Doc 9835, which addresses language proficiency training for aviation professionals. The research seeks to explore the applicability of these guidelines in real-world aviation settings, with a particular focus on the Brazilian context. Given my 14 years of experience as an air traffic controller, this study integrates both theoretical exploration of the document and the practical application of its language proficiency standards based on my personal experiences in aviation communication.

Considering the research paradigm of this monograph, the monograph adopts a reflective, qualitative approach, grounded in the principles of Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). These paradigms were chosen because they emphasize the importance of contextualizing language training and understanding communication as a dynamic and multifaceted process. This study aligns with the interpretative research tradition, which values the complexity of social phenomena and the role of the researcher's subjectivity in the production of knowledge (Denzin; Lincoln, 2006).

While ICAO Doc 9835 provides standardized language proficiency requirements, the focus of this research is on critically assessing the document's approach, especially its limitations in addressing sociocultural, emotional, and contextual factors that affect communication in aviation. In this context, the study examines how ICAO standards apply to real-life aviation communication and how they might be adapted to meet the diverse needs of aviation professionals from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The methodology combines personal reflection on the document's standards (data collection) with analysis of real-world aviation communication, drawn from my own professional experiences.

As this is a qualitative study, there are no external participants involved. Data collection was based solely on my experiential knowledge as an air traffic controller and a careful examination of ICAO Doc 9835. The research process included the following steps:

Document Analysis: I analyzed Chapter 7 of ICAO Doc 9835, focusing on the language proficiency training standards for aviation professionals. This involved a detailed review of the guidelines, focusing on the competencies outlined for

pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and interaction. I also explored how these competencies are described in the context of routine operations and emergency situations, where communication failures can have critical consequences.

**Personal Reflection:** Drawing on my extensive experience as an air traffic controller, I reflected on how the language proficiency guidelines in ICAO Doc 9835 are applied in practice. I considered how aviation-specific vocabulary, phraseology, and communication protocols are used in everyday operations and how these elements align (or conflict) with the standards set by ICAO. Reflection also involves considering the emotional and psychological factors that impact communication in high-stress environments, such as emergencies or technical failures.

**Comparative Analysis:** I compared the standards in ICAO Doc 9835 with real-world scenarios and challenges I have encountered in my work as an air traffic controller. This analysis considered the linguistic diversity of aviation professionals (e.g., accents, regional speech patterns) and the ways in which non-standard English might be used effectively in aviation communication, a factor not always emphasized in ICAO's guidelines.

**Reflection on the Limitations of ICAO Doc 9835:** Through the analysis, I critically examined the limitations of the ICAO standards, specifically in how they fail to address context-specific needs. The study highlights the importance of contextualized language training—such as task-based learning in aviation communication—which allows for a more accurate reflection of how language is used in actual aviation operations.

Since this research is based solely on my professional experience in the study of publicly available documents, traditional ethical considerations regarding confidentiality and consent are not applicable. Nevertheless, the insights presented stem from my background as an air traffic controller and are intended to contribute constructively to the improvement of aviation language training and communication safety. This methodology, which integrates document analysis, personal reflection, and critical evaluation, serves to explore the role of language proficiency in aviation communication within the framework of ICAO Doc 9835. By employing Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as guiding frameworks, this study critically examines how ICAO's standards are applied in real-world aviation contexts, identifying gaps and suggesting ways to enhance the

inclusivity and effectiveness of language training in Brazil. Ultimately, the reflective approach adopted here advocates for a more flexible, context-sensitive model of aviation language proficiency—one that acknowledges the diversity and complex realities faced by aviation professionals on a daily basis.

## 5. Analysis of ICAO Doc 9835 Chapter 7: Language Proficiency Training in Aviation through the Lens of ESP and CAL

In the field of aviation, effective communication is critical to operational safety and efficiency. Recognizing that communication failures have contributed to numerous incidents and accidents, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) developed Doc 9835 to define and standardize language proficiency requirements. Chapter 7 of this document is particularly relevant, as it addresses the structure, content, and delivery of language training programs for aviation professionals, ensuring that communication can occur clearly and efficiently, particularly in emergency situations where language is the key to preventing disaster.

While the document establishes a solid global framework, it also reveals limitations when examined through the lenses of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL), particularly when juxtaposed with the lived realities of aviation professionals in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

It remains limited by the standardized approach and fails to account for sociocultural, emotional, and identity-based factors that shape real-world communication. This analysis seeks to explore the gaps within ICAO Doc 9835, emphasizing how English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) can enhance aviation language training by addressing the specific needs of learners and promoting a more inclusive, reflective, and contextualized approach to language proficiency in the aviation context.

Chapter 7 of ICAO Doc 9835 provides specific proficiency levels for aviation language skills, categorizing them from Level 1 (Pre-Elementary) to Level 6 (Expert). The chapter emphasizes the need for pilots and ATCs to be proficient in key communicative competencies, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and interaction. These competencies ensure that professionals can handle the demands of routine operations and non-routine or emergency situations.

Doc 9835 emphasizes that "the training programme should be based on communicative approaches to language learning and teaching" (ICAO, 2010, p. 7-3)<sup>4</sup>, and further recommends that "a range of training methods should be used to ensure communicative competence, not just memorization of phraseology" (p. 7-5). These guidelines reflect a shift toward communicative competence rather than rote learning. The communicative approach (which is based on interaction, real-life communication tasks, and the meaningful use of language) prioritizes the learner's ability to perform effectively in authentic contexts. Nonetheless, the document does not elaborate on how these methods might be adapted across diverse regional contexts or operational roles. This generality, while useful for global applicability, can leave important pedagogical decisions open to interpretation.

From the perspective of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), this lack of contextual detail is significant. ESP emphasizes the importance of tailoring instruction to the actual needs and communicative tasks of learners in specific professional domains (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). ICAO Doc 9835 partially acknowledges this by recommending that training be designed based on needs analyses that account for the learners' roles and communicative contexts (ICAO, 2010, p. 7-4). However, the document does not define how these analyses should be conducted or how content might be meaningfully differentiated, for example, between the language demands of tower controllers and those of en-route or radar controllers.

In my professional trajectory, I have engaged in various functions within air traffic control, each of which presented distinct communicative challenges. For instance, during the six years I worked at the Brasília Area Control Center (ACC Brasília), I was responsible for managing aircraft en route at higher flight levels. The scope of control was broad, and potential conflicts between aircraft occurred with greater time margins, allowing for measured responses and long-term planning. Later, upon transferring to the Approach Control Unit at Galeão (APP Galeão), the communicative environment changed significantly. In this role, I had to manage aircraft approaching for landing at both Galeão and Santos Dumont airports. The control area was considerably smaller, and decisions had to be made quickly and clearly, as aircraft were already in descent and operating in close proximity. These contrasting experiences illustrate how the nature of communication shifts depending

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<sup>4</sup> All page references to ICAO (2010) follow the internal numbering system used in Chapter 7 of Doc 9835 (e.g., p. 7-3 refers to the third page within Chapter 7, not the overall document pagination).

on the operational context, demanding not only different linguistic strategies but also different cognitive and temporal responses. Underscoring the importance of training that reflects real-world roles rather than assuming a uniform communicative model.

ESP also values the use of authentic materials and task-based learning. While Doc 9835 encourages the use of real-world scenarios, it leaves room for interpretation regarding what counts as “authentic.” In certain instructional contexts I have observed, communicative simulations tend to favor idealized interactions rather than the ambiguous, multi-accented, and emotionally charged situations encountered in real operations. I recall a particular situation in which I was giving instructions to a non-native English-speaking pilot during a period of high traffic and deteriorating weather conditions. The pilot’s accent and speech rate made it difficult to immediately understand a request for deviation due to turbulence. Instead of repeating the standard phraseology, I instinctively switched to a clearer, slower mode of speech, paraphrasing the message and confirming mutual understanding step by step. I also used clarification strategies, such as readbacks and closed questions, to ensure we were aligned before issuing the new clearance. In that moment, effective communication depended less on strictly following preset phrases and more on our mutual adaptability, situational awareness, and ability to negotiate meaning under pressure.

Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL), in turn, broadens the analysis beyond pedagogical alignment. It invites reflection on how language policies and practices are shaped by ideologies, identities, and power relations (Pennycook, 2001). Doc 9835’s reliance on a native-speaker model of English is one area where this becomes apparent. The document states that “the target proficiency should be based on the Expert level descriptors... which reflect native speaker competence in intelligibility and interaction” (ICAO, 2010, p. 7-6). While this benchmark may serve as a reference point for consistency, it can also perpetuate unrealistic expectations in multilingual environments where English functions as a lingua franca among non-native speakers.

In live operational settings, it is common to engage with a wide variety of Englishes — influenced by region, accent, and speaker fluency. In such contexts, mutual understanding often depends more on shared strategies for clarification and negotiation than on adherence to a native-like model. In one operational situation, I was coordinating with an Argentine pilot whose English carried a strong Spanish

accent. During the initial contact, there was a momentary ambiguity regarding the assigned heading due to slight pronunciation differences and radio interference. Rather than repeating the instruction verbatim, I adapted my communication by using simpler phrasing and emphasizing key words to ensure clarity. The pilot responded by repeating the clearance slowly and clearly, confirming mutual understanding. This interaction exemplified how, despite accent variation, communication can remain effective when both parties are willing to adjust and cooperate. It was a clear demonstration that successful communication in aviation often depends not on flawless language use, but on the shared effort to build understanding in real-time operational contexts. CAL encourages us to value such interactions as legitimate and functional, even when they deviate from the “idealized” norm.

Another important dimension highlighted by CAL is the emotional and psychological reality of aviation communication. While Doc 9835 focuses on structural and linguistic aspects of proficiency, it gives little attention to the emotional demands placed on professionals in critical situations. From my own experience, moments involving unexpected weather, technical failures, or operational overload often required not only linguistic clarity but also calm, emotional regulation, and the ability to simplify or repeat messages under pressure. I once encountered a situation while working in the Rio de Janeiro Approach Control (APP RJ) in which a pilot informed me that a passenger on board had lost consciousness. I had to quickly and clearly collect essential information — such as the passenger’s name, age, symptoms, and seat number — in order to pass it on to my assistant, who would coordinate medical assistance on the ground. At the same time, I continued managing other aircraft under my responsibility and ensured that my tone of voice remained calm and reassuring so as not to cause additional distress to the pilot. In that moment, maintaining emotional control was as important as linguistic accuracy: it was crucial to convey composure and clarity while coordinating multiple tasks in parallel. This situation demonstrated how communicative competence in aviation also involves the ability to manage stress and interact strategically in high-pressure environments where every word matters.

Furthermore, Doc 9835 states that “adaptation to regional contexts is encouraged” (ICAO, 2010, p. 7-8), but does not provide concrete examples or frameworks for such adaptation. This can lead to uneven interpretations of what adaptation entails. In settings such as Brazil, where communication routinely involves

navigating between English phraseology and local operational norms, there is a need for clearer guidance on how to integrate local challenges without compromising international standards. In my work at Rio de Janeiro Approach Control (APP RJ), I frequently communicated with helicopters flying offshore routes to oil platforms located along the Brazilian coast. These flights followed specific procedures that differed from those of fixed-wing aircraft, including lower altitudes, non-standard routings, and unique points of reference such as helidecks or platform identifiers. Although English was used, some elements of phraseology required adaptation to reflect this operational reality. For instance, I often had to confirm positions or headings using locally recognized geographic references or adapt my speech rate and structure to ensure understanding across different backgrounds. These adjustments, while remaining within professional standards, were essential to ensure safety and effectiveness in a setting where local knowledge and flexibility played a crucial role.

CAL argues that training programs should position professionals not merely as passive recipients of knowledge, but as co-constructors of learning. This involves creating spaces for reflection, dialogue, and analysis of real communication events. Throughout my career, I have participated in study groups (like GEIA and CTP011) and collaborative discussions where professionals shared recordings, analyzed misunderstandings, and collectively explored more effective strategies. These moments aligned more with the spirit of CAL than with the prescriptive structure found in the document.

In conclusion, chapter 7 of ICAO Doc 9835 offers a structured and internationally recognized foundation for aviation language training, emphasizing communicative competence as essential to operational safety. However, a closer examination through the lenses of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) reveals that, while the document outlines valuable principles, it falls short in addressing the sociocultural, emotional, and context-specific dimensions of professional communication.

ESP highlights the importance of grounding language instruction in the real-world tasks and communicative roles of aviation professionals. Although Doc 9835 mentions the relevance of needs analysis and task-based learning, it does not provide detailed guidance for adapting training to specific operational realities. Drawing from my own experience in different air traffic control roles, I have observed

that communication demands vary significantly depending on the nature of the task, the interlocutor, and the operational environment. Such variation calls for more flexible and targeted pedagogical approaches, which are not fully addressed in the document.

CAL contributes further by questioning the assumptions behind standardized models of proficiency. The reliance on native-speaker norms, while intended to ensure clarity, can obscure the legitimacy and functionality of the diverse Englishes spoken by aviation professionals worldwide. Moreover, CAL draws attention to human factors often absent from policy documents, such as emotional regulation under stress and the sociopolitical implications of language use in multicultural contexts. These factors are crucial in real-time, high-stakes communication but are insufficiently explored in Doc 9835.

A critical reading of Chapter 7, supported by my practical knowledge of the communicative demands of air traffic control, suggests the need for a more inclusive and context-sensitive model of training. Integrating the theoretical contributions of ESP and CAL allows for the development of pedagogical practices that are not only operationally effective but also ethically responsive and attuned to the lived realities of aviation professionals.

In sum, while ICAO Doc 9835 provides important global benchmarks, its training guidelines must evolve to reflect the complex, multilingual, and emotionally charged nature of aviation communication. A training model that embraces local variation, values professional experience and acknowledges the sociocultural dimensions of language use can better serve the goals of safety, efficiency and equity in global aviation.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This research has explored the intersection of ICAO Doc 9835, which sets global language proficiency standards for aviation, with the pedagogical frameworks of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL). Through a detailed analysis of Chapter 7 of ICAO Doc 9835, this study has highlighted the importance of language proficiency in ensuring safety and effective communication within aviation. However, it has also revealed the limitations of a standardized approach to language proficiency, which often fails to address the sociocultural, psychological, and contextual factors that shape real-world communication in aviation.

By integrating key principles from ESP and CAL, this research advocates for a more inclusive, reflective, and context-sensitive approach to aviation language training. While ICAO's guidelines provide a foundational framework, they primarily focus on technical accuracy and linguistic competence, which are essential for operational safety. However, these standards often overlook the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of aviation professionals, as well as the emotional and social dynamics that play a critical role in effective communication, especially in high-stakes or emergency situations.

ESP plays a key role in tailoring aviation language training to meet the specific communicative needs of aviation professionals. Unlike General English, which aims to develop broad linguistic skills, ESP focuses on task-based learning and real-world applications, ensuring that language instruction is relevant to the professional context. In aviation, this means that language training should not only cover aviation-specific terminology but also address the communication practices that professionals will encounter in dynamic, multicultural, and often high-pressure situations. By using authentic materials and engaging in contextualized simulations, ESP helps learners develop the linguistic and communicative competence needed to navigate complex aviation environments safely and effectively.

In addition, Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) offers a critical perspective on the standardization of language proficiency in aviation. CAL challenges the prescriptive nature of language teaching by emphasizing the sociocultural, identity-based, and emotional aspects of communication. In the context of aviation, CAL encourages the

recognition of global Englishes and regional accents, advocating for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the linguistic diversity of aviation professionals worldwide. This is crucial in a field where communication breakdowns can have serious consequences. By moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach, CAL promotes an understanding of language as a socially situated and negotiated process, highlighting the importance of context in shaping how professionals communicate and interpret messages in real-world scenarios.

One of the key insights from this research is the need for local contextualization within aviation language training. While ICAO's language proficiency standards provide an international benchmark, they do not fully address the local realities of language use in different regions. As seen in Brazil, for example, the training and proficiency assessments for aviation professionals must consider local language challenges, such as accents and the specific cultural dynamics of communication within the Brazilian aviation context. ESP and CAL both emphasize the importance of reflecting local needs in training materials, ensuring that language proficiency assessments are not only standardized but also relevant and adaptive to the specific linguistic and cultural challenges faced by learners.

By incorporating theoretical perspectives from ESP and CAL into aviation language training, we can move towards a more holistic approach to language proficiency that not only ensures safety and operational efficiency but also promotes equity and inclusivity. This research underscores the importance of developing context-sensitive language training that takes into account the human dimension of communication in aviation, allowing for a more reflective and adaptive approach to language learning.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing dialogue about how to enhance language proficiency in aviation. By integrating critical reflection, real-world application, and inclusive pedagogical approaches, aviation language training can better meet the diverse needs of professionals in a globalized world. It is essential to continue refining language training methods that not only meet the technical demands of aviation but also recognize and respond to the human, sociocultural, and emotional aspects of communication. This research sets the stage for further exploration and development of aviation language training that is both effective and inclusive, preparing aviation professionals to navigate their roles with confidence, competence, and understanding.

At the end of my course at PUC-Rio, I realized that I did not want the course to end. Upon reflection, I became aware that, in reality, the course itself does not have a definite endpoint because everything I have learned continues to shape my professional and personal growth. This learning is a continuous process, and the conclusion of the course marks not an end but the beginning of new understandings and developments. I carry with me the knowledge and insights gained, and these will continue to evolve as I integrate them into my professional life.

I feel the same way about this research paper. While I've reached the conclusion of this work, I know it is not finished. There is still so much to explore, read, and understand. The process of investigating aviation language proficiency, as laid out in ICAO Doc 9835, and integrating frameworks such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL), is just one part of an ongoing journey. The more I study, the more I realize the complexity of aviation communication and the many layers of linguistic and cultural dynamics that influence our professional interactions in this global industry.

The approach to language learning in aviation is more than just methodologies; they represent ways of being in my work environment. Despite the technical tasks that I, as an air traffic controller, must accomplish daily, my work is not merely about completing tasks but also about constant interaction, reflection, and construction of meaning. Each day, I engage in real-time communication with aviation professionals from diverse backgrounds, and the process of understanding is never finished. Every communication exchange is a step towards better mutual understanding and safety.

In the context of aviation, working for understanding is a continuous endeavor. The challenges we face as aviation professionals—whether due to linguistic barriers, emotional states in high-stress situations, or the cultural diversity of our colleagues—remind me that my learning is a never-ending process. The more I immerse myself in the complexities of language proficiency in aviation, the more I realize how much more there is to learn and improve. As I continue in my role, I understand that the ability to adapt and respond effectively will always require further reflection and study, just as this research paper has shown me the need for ongoing critical engagement.

In this sense, I align with the words of professors Inés Miller and Maria Isabel A. Cunha, as cited in Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 221): "Understanding is not

something you achieve once and for all; it is a continuing process, and one that we engage in together.” These words remind me that, both in teaching and in aviation practice, understanding is an ongoing journey—one that never truly concludes but rather evolves as we deepen our knowledge and experience. This journey of reflection and growth is something that I carry with me and that will continue throughout my career in aviation.

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