

LANGUAGE USE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR FLIGHT ATTENDANTS

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Abstract: Speaking and listening skills to flight attendants having international routes are very important to support their performance when dealing with passengers. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 1951 and 2004 issued an announcement that English became the compulsory language used for international aviation. Moreover, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), in 1994, required flight attendants to understand sufficient English to communicate, coordinate, and perform all related safety duties on board. This article suggests some methods in teaching English for pre-service flight attendants. As speaking and listening play very important roles in the workplace of flight attendants, role play and speaking practice in the classroom can be very useful for pre-service flight attendants when they are still in the training center. Role plays with topics related with the real work situation such as boarding, seating, announcement, meals and drink service, personal approach as well as farewell should be provided for pre-service flight attendants together with pronunciation practice. To increase the effectiveness of the English course, additional English materials with the help of technology such as videos on airlines safety demonstration, announcement, and other recordings related with the use of polite languages as well as in-flight vocabulary could be used to train the listening skill. The rapid development in technology can also be an advantage in equipping flight attendants with materials in cultural issues. Flight attendants need cultural sensitivity when dealing passengers with different cultural backgrounds; therefore, increasing their cross-cultural understanding is very important.

Keywords: Flight attendants, language use, communication skills

Speaking and listening skills to flight attendants having international routes are very important to support their performance when dealing with passengers. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 1951 and 2004 issued an announcement that English became the compulsory language used for international aviation. Moreover, the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA), in 1994, required flight attendants to understand sufficient English to communicate, coordinate, and perform all related safety duties on board. The two organizations for aviation have issued an important aspect for flight attendants, that is, English proficiency. World-class airlines set a high-standard of English proficiency. Strong English communication skills are important for flight attendants, regardless of their native language and the stage of their career.

Greater proficiency in English, together with cultural sensitivity can help prevent difficult (and potentially dangerous) situation.

Flight attendants, especially, those who work for international routes usually meet passengers from all over the world. To handle their business, these passengers have to speak an international language usually spoken worldwide, English. This means, flight attendants must be competent in English so that they can handle every possible situation which might happen during their flight-duty and off-duty. Before flight attendants could come to the real working condition, they have to learn how to speak English well during their time in the training center. When they are trained in the training center, they have a precious moment to practice and maximize their English.

In this article, we are going to look at some of the language that can be used when dealing with passengers. The language that is used is mostly for making suggestions and advice to passengers on board, handling problematic situations that can occur during flight as well as some communication techniques. A flight attendant will be expected to have information about the origin and destination and to give information clearly and thoughtfully. The problematic situation can occur during flight. This could involve dealing with intoxicated passengers or uncooperative people in the air. As a flight attendant on a commercial airlines having international route, he/she will come across a large mix of people from all backgrounds and cultures. Giving advice to passengers after they have asked a question requires a friendly, approachable attitude. Even if flight attendants are busy they need to show that they are happy to speak to the passenger with good body language and posturing. All competences in communication are considered as sociolinguistic competence where some competences in linguistic, social and cultural knowledge, and rules of discourse.

This article also suggests some methods in teaching English for pre-service flight attendants. As speaking and listening play very important roles in the workplace of flight attendants, role plays and speaking practice in the classroom can be very useful for pre-service flight attendants when they are still in the training center. Role plays with topics related with the real work situation such as boarding, seating, announcement, meals and drink service, personal approach as well as farewell should be provided for pre-service flight attendants together with pronunciation practice. To increase the effectiveness of the English course, additional English materials with the help of technology such as videos on airlines safety demonstration, announcement, and other recordings related with the use of polite languages as well as in-flight vocabulary could be used to train the listening skill. The materials can be downloaded from the Internet. The rapid development in technology can also be an advantage in equipping flight attendants with materials in cultural issues. Flight attendants need cultural sensitivity when dealing passengers with different cultural backgrounds. Using computers and the Internet to download materials, show videos, or even conduct skype or teleconference with other parties from different cultures could be done in the classroom to increase cross-cultural understanding.

LANGUAGE USE

English language has been playing an important role in the international communication and has become the most widely spoken language in the world. Indeed, it has become one of five official languages used in The United Nations Organization. English has become the bridging language among nations worldwide. Persons with different nationalities will automatically speak English whenever they meet. English is a lingua franca which connects the communication and relations among nations. English has played as a bridging language which enables them to exchange their ideas. Specific occupation requires one to use language which is relevant to their job. The specialized language functions use relevant occupational vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

Language has various functional uses. Basturkmen (2006) proposes four language functional uses which are used frequently within today's English for Specific Purposes course. The four uses are speech acts, genres, social interaction and specific terms within a particular discipline. The concept of speech acts is the use of language which is concerned with the intentions of the speaker or the writer (i.e. requesting, ordering, reporting, and apologizing). Hatch (1992) in Basturkmen (2006) adds that the speech acts can be classified to directives (i.e. asking, insisting, requesting), commissives (i.e. offering, threatening, promising), representatives (i.e. believing, denying, reporting), declaratives (i.e. claiming, declaring, publishing) and expressives (i.e. apologizing, welcoming, liking). It leads to the role of pragmatics and socio-pragmatics. Then the concept of genres is more specific than the previous concept.

Basturkmen (2006) states that "genre theory seeks to explain the texts used by groups or communities by reference to the functions of the groups or communities and their outlook on the world". For instance, a research proposal in physics is different with research proposal in accounting. Then a social work report differs from financial report. The third is the concept of the language use based on the social interaction. Basturkmen (2006) explains that the concept concerns with the way the speaker or the writer interacts strategically with his or her interlocutor or reader. Then the last concept is specific terms within a particular discipline. "This type of description is concerned with word or structure choice, which words or structures are commonly chosen, and the meanings or uses they have in specific disciplines, professions, or workplace environments" (Basturkmen, 2006).

Language functions also highlight sociolinguistic competence involving some ways of using language appropriately in a given situation, given the setting, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating. Sociolinguistic competence asks: Which words and phrases fit this setting and this topic? How can I express a specific attitude (courtesy, authority, friendliness, respect) when I need to? How do I know what attitude another person is expressing? Many types and variations of communication and messages need to be delivered in a clear and comprehensive way. Setyaningsih (2009) in her thesis on developing a communicative syllabus for pre-service flight attendant mentioned that speaking and listening skills are needed as the main key to be a successful flight attendant is a good communication. When

conducting the needs analysis involving flight attendants, ex-flight attendants and passengers, the findings in her research showed that speaking materials are considered very important in the teaching of English. Foreign passengers in international as well as domestic flights use English when communicating with the flight attendants and this makes all aspects in speaking skill such as fluency, intonation, speed, and voice clarity become very important to be learned. This also deals with announcement made by flight attendants in welcoming their passengers and conducting flight safety demonstration.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is unavoidable in human being's life. People communicate with others directly as well as indirectly. In communication, there is always delivering and exchanging ideas to one another. The exchanges of ideas may give us a lot of information; on the other hand, the ideas can be shared with others. People communicate in most of their life and the ability of communicating is innate.

A harmonious communication does not occur automatically. It demands a good means of communication. Here, a language to bridge the communication is needed. Language, as stated by Crystal in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (1997) is a system which mediates in highly complex way; between the universe meaning and the universe of sound. There is usually a speaker and a hearer to make communication exists. Language enables the speaker to transform configuration of meaningful sound, and it enables the hearer to understand the sound produced by the speaker and he/she can transform these sound into a reasonable script. In other words, a thought in the speaker's mind is encoded through a language, which is then decoded by the hearer, so that the thought ends up in his/her mind.

In addition, Crystal (1997) mentioned that communication is a crucial factor in our social life and it becomes the basic of our social life. It means that people cannot live normally as full human being without communication. Communication is intended for various reasons: get in touch with others to reach specific goal, and to assist others achieve their goals. Other intentions are to negotiate and work toward the accomplishment of a set of mutually constructed purposes. People can also continually develop and manage their personal identities, relationship, and multicultural relationship through communication.

Flight attendants must be effective communicators. Their duties include advising passengers on proper emergency procedures, and conveying the information in a clear manner. They need to be good listeners to understand what passenger requests. In emergencies, flight attendants issue instructions in a concise, intelligible manner. It may be necessary at times for flight attendants to relay information to the flight crew, and they need to present the information plainly and with minimal distractions (Joyner, 2015). Some tips for flight attendants on how to communicate better are taken from <http://www.newflightcrew.com>. The article mentions about the single most important skill required by a flight attendant, they are verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal uses words while non-verbal uses eye contact, dress and look, gestures and body language, posture, smell and facial expressions.

Verbal communication involves tone of voice and choice of words. A lot of things can be interpreted from a person's tone of voice. It means that speaking with passengers need different tone of voice compared with speaking to the colleagues. While choice of words include avoiding sarcastic words but use natural, friendly, and professional words instead. For non-verbal communication, eye contact is important as it shows an interest to what passengers say. Staring is not advisable as in some cultures, staring is considered very rude. Gestures and body language are two other elements needed more attention as these two relate with cultures. A flight attendant must be careful in using gestures and body language as they can be interpreted differently with various cultures.

SUGGESTED TEACHING METHODS

According to Setyaningsih (2009), in the findings of her study on developing syllabus for flight attendants, the skill that obtains the most attention in the communicative syllabus is speaking. This skill is useful for flight attendants when dealing with passengers. Fluency in speaking also plays an important role in handling all kinds of communication problems happen in-flight. Speaking skill includes the clarity of in-flight announcement, giving opinions, and giving clearer explanations to what happens during flight. Another skill is listening that also plays important part in handling the passengers. Here, passengers ask flight attendants to give full attention to them by listening actively to them to avoid giving wrong instruction.

When it comes to the teaching and learning in the training center, the result of the study by Setyaningsih (2009) shows that speaking also becomes the main objective in the instructional objective for most training centers. Other skills also obtain some attention but not much. Role plays and speaking practice are used mostly as the method for teaching but other methods such as lecturing, question and answer, demonstration, and modeling could be implemented. Teaching media or aids are really needed in teaching the pre-service flight attendants. In the training centers, teaching media are ranging from audio-video, LCD projectors, computers, CD/DVD players, realia (trolleys for serving, plates, cup and saucer, boarding pass, safety-demo kits, etc.).

In order to increase the students' abilities in speaking, some useful expressions in speaking with the passengers are given to initiate dialogues created suitable for the condition. The speaking skill will be given in dialogues representing working conditions such as 1) Boarding and Seating, 2) Before Take-off, 3) Meals and Drinks Service, 4) Socializing/Personal Service, 5) Sales on Board, 6) Before/After Landing and Parting, 7) Flight Safety Procedure, and 8) Announcement. For listening skill, the students are given materials such as recordings of real announcement from flight attendants, DVD containing films for flight safety procedure, and films on real working conditions from airlines. The listening materials will present students with real life speaking and some examples of dialogs from various accents as those students will meet many people coming from different places and nationality around the world.

The lexical contents of the communicative syllabus concern with vocabulary related to the field of passenger service, airlines, and aviation terms and a small percentage of general English. This is intended to familiarize them

with terms in offering, requesting, apologizing, and asking permission. While some aviation terms are given as these flight attendants are working inside the airplane and they must have knowledge on airplanes, its general system, and how some parts work. Airlines terms will give knowledge for students to deal with airport, ticketing system, check-in, boarding, etc. The following paragraphs suggest some expressions used by flight attendants when communicating with passengers. The expressions are for requesting, asking permissions, offering something, apologizing, and other expressions used onboard from boarding to after landing stage (taken from English for Cabin Crew by Sue Ellis and Lewis Landsford, 2014).

Boarding and seating

Welcome aboard! Good morning / afternoon / evening	Greeting passengers
May I see your boarding pass, please?	“May” is used to request permission in a polite way with “I” as the subject
Could you put this bag in the overhead compartment?	“Could” is used for a polite request with “you” as the subject
Could you please fasten your seatbelt?	“Would” is also a very polite way of suggesting or requesting something
Would you like some candies, sir/ma’am?	
Would you mind sitting in the window seat?	“Would you mind + verb-ing as the preferred alternative to “Could you...”

Before take-off

Would you care for	a sweet a drink a newspaper	for your ears
May I offer you	a pen a pillow some champagne a blanket	with our Sir/ ? compliments madam
Would you like	slippers games	for your comfort

Meals and Drink Service

We’d like to serve you drinks and snacks as quickly as possible	“We’d like: we would like”
Would you like fish or chicken?	“Would you like + noun”
Anything to drink?/what would you like to drink?	Both expressions are polite and can be used when offering something
Here you go/here you are	The expressions when handing in something but “here you go” is more informal

Socializing/personal service

Are you feeling better now, sir/ma'am?	Asking passenger's condition
Can I help you, sir/ma'am?	Offering a help
Did you call, sir/ma'am?	Assuring something
Is everything alright?	Checking certain condition
I do apologize	Politely denying the request
I'm afraid not. I'm not allowed to do that	
I can't promise anything but I'll see what I can do	Acknowledging a request and offering a course of action

Sales on board

Would you like to see/have a look at/buy	Making offers
Certainly. But I'll have to give you your change in dollars	Talking about change
I'm glad you like it. Here you are	Showing duty free items
That's 22,000 yen, sir	Saying prices with currency

Before/After Landing and Parting

We will keep you update of any changes	Keeping passengers informed
We will be landing in Cengkareng shortly	Explaining what will happen
Welcome to Juanda airport	After landing greeting
Please take anything of value with you	Reminding passengers
Thank you for flying with us and good bye	Farewell

Flight safety procedure

We'll be diverting to Denpasar airport	Giving information and advice
Pull the mask towards your face	
Because the air pressure is too low	Giving a reason
There's nothing to worry/concerned about	Reassuring the passenger
Can you switch it off, please?	Asking for a cooperation
I strongly advice you to.../I suggest you to	Advice
...	
That's not allowed	Explaining rules and regulations
You can't use ...	
If you do not cooperate, this will...	Warning

CONCLUSION

The airline business is highly competitive nowadays. Every leading airlines requires professional personnel to provide professional service. Due to the specification of flight attendants' duties, communication between flight attendants and passengers must be clear and understandable. In order to be able to compete with other international airlines, Indonesian flight attendants flying international routes must have high-level of English proficiency and communication skills that enable them to serve passengers on board and ensure their safety. The flights will run smoothly if flight attendants master those two things together with other abilities in cabin practice, some paperwork for completing documents, problem solving, and quick action if problems appear.

The training for pre-service flight attendants play very important roles as this is the time flight attendants are introduced with many things dealing with the real working environment. Along with good preparation in the training, the

instructors must also master subjects given to the flight attendants. English and communication classes must be given more attention during the training with more practices in speaking, listening, and communication skill with a touch of cultural sensitivity. Some useful phrases dealing with passengers could be taught to flight attendant students so that they understand what passengers. The ability to understand passengers need to be equipped with cross-cultural understanding so there will not be misunderstanding leading to an uneasy condition during the flight.

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