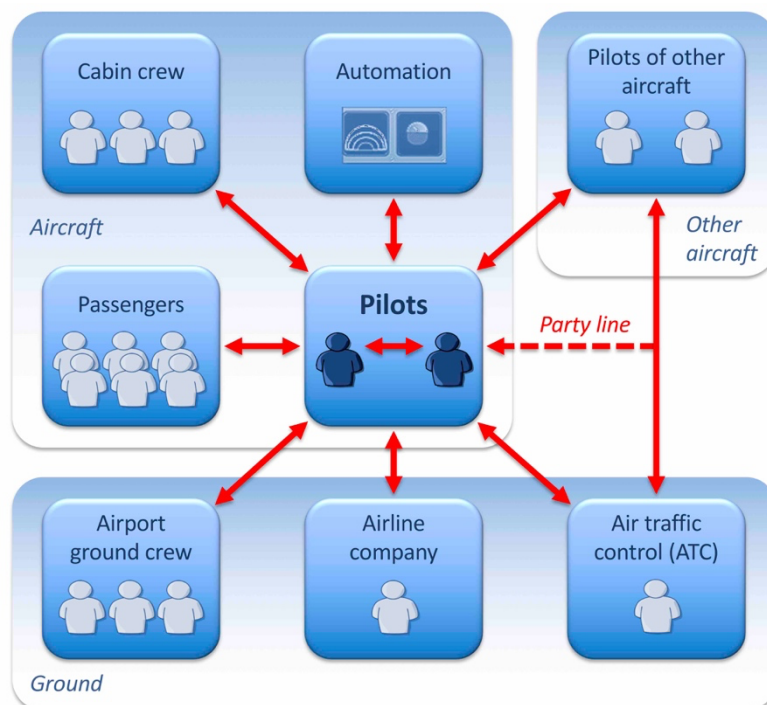




Overview of Pilot Communication

Communication is an important part of the work of commercial pilots. A typical airline flight consists of a number of phases: preflight, taxi, takeoff, departure, climb, en route (or cruise), descent, approach, landing, taxi and arrival. During these phases, pilots communicate with a range of personnel including air traffic controllers, dispatchers, gate agents, ground crew, flight attendants, maintenance technicians and other pilots, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Pilot interactions during a flight.



The interactions necessitate the use of various language skills. Some tasks require pilots to read (eg: completing checklists) or write (eg: filling out weight and balance sheets). Other tasks, such as communicating with cabin crew or air traffic control (ATC), largely involve speaking and listening. Pilots engage in two distinct types of interaction during a flight:

- (1) **intra-cockpit communication** – interaction between crew members on the flight deck;
- (2) **pilot-ATC communication** – interaction between pilots and air traffic controllers, which includes oral communication via radio links as well as **data link** text messages.

One feature of pilot communication on international flights is regular code switching between different registers, dialects or languages. For example, a pilot uses **plain English** for intra-cockpit dialogue with other crew members, then switches to **standard phraseology** in a transmission to ATC. Alternatively, a native English speaker (NES) pilot who contacts ATC while flying over a Spanish-speaking country may use English interspersed with a few Spanish words such as “gracias” or “buenos noches”.