Phraseology's syntactic, lexical and semantic characteristics make it the essential communication tool for the transmission of the fundamental information required for providing optimal and safe guidance of air traffic. However, since it has been created to cover only a limited number of air navigation situations, phraseology is a limited tool:

> While ICAO standardized phraseology has been developed to cover many circumstances, it cannot address all pilot and controller communication needs. It is widely acknowledged by operational and linguistic experts that no set of standardized phraseologies can fully describe all possible circumstances and responses (ICAO, 2010: 1.2.3).

Thus, when facing situations for which phraseology does not exist, pilots and controllers must resort to a more natural language known as "plain language".

3. Plain Language

Pilots and controllers' communication needs in situations for which phraseology is not enough requires the usage of natural language – though constrained by phraseology's rules of clarity, preciseness and concision (Mell, 1992: 73). This form of natural language is referred to by the ICAO as "plain language" and is prescribed as a last resort when phraseology has reached its limits:

> ICAO standardized phraseology shall be used in all situations for which it has been specified. Only when standardized phraseology cannot serve an intended transmission, plain language shall be used (2001: 5.1.1.1).

> ICAO standardized phraseology should always be used in the first instance (2010: 4.3.3).

The transition from an operative language, such as phraseology, to natural language in unusual situations is accounted for by Falzon (1986: 37) by the absence of procedure patterns in such situations which leads operators to use a more powerful but not specialised representation tool, i.e. natural language. Unlike natural language, prescribed linguistic norms leave indeed no room for creativity. According to the ICAO, natural language – and the creativity that it implies, particularly when dealing with an unexpected turn of events – is the best instrument for human interaction:

> Linguistic research now makes it clear that there is no form of speech more suitable for human communication than **natural language**. [...] Human language is characterized, in part, by its ability to create new meanings and to use words in novel contexts. This creative function of language is especially useful in accommodating the complex and unpredictable nature of human interaction, including in the context of aviation communications. There is simply no more suitable form of speech for human interactions than **natural languages** (2010: 1.3.2).

Nonetheless, the terminology chosen by the ICAO to refer to the language used when phraseology does not exist is "plain language", not "natural language". One could then assume that plain language and natural language are not alike: plain language should not be considered as natural language since it is supposed to comply with phraseology's standards. It has indeed been recently officially defined as such by the ICAO:

> Plain language in aeronautical radiotelephony communications means the spontaneous, creative and non-coded use of a given natural language, although constrained by the functions and topics (aviation and non-aviation) that are required by aeronautical radiotelephony communications, as well as by specific safety-critical requirements for intelligibility, directness, appropriacy, non-ambiguity and concision (2010: 3.3.14).