



Ray Vuillermin

THERE IS a story, perhaps apocryphal, about a slow talking but quick thinking corporate pilot from the south of the United States, who had to take his biz jet into one of New York's busy airports.

His clearance was delivered in rapid-fire Noo York speak. He called back, saying: "Y'all-up-there-in-the-tower, hear-how-fast ah'm-torkin – well that's how fast ah listen!"

Pilots everywhere get endless hours of amusement swapping yarns about funny things heard on the R/T – stories normally told in the first person.

But there is a serious side to the issue. Good R/T procedures ensure a safe and expeditious movement of aircraft. Judging from what is heard over the airways in the real world these days, these objectives are not being achieved.

Recently, two CASA staff spent hours attempting to transcribe about 15 minutes of taped transmissions from a CTAF. A pilot had reported a near miss, claiming that the other aircraft had not made the required calls. Despite slowing and enhancing the tape, a good portion of it had to be considered unreadable.

The transmissions were too fast, mumbled and non-standard. One pilot on the frequency came over 5 by 5, as he did speak slowly, clearly and authoritatively, using correct phraseology. His aircraft was not involved in the near miss.

Bad microphone techniques, mumbling, rapid patter, poorly maintained radios and headsets, and inappropriate use of the radio are exacerbated by pilots attempting to establish themselves as characters on the airwaves. You have heard them – the Fighter Jock with clipped, rapid responses; Joe Cool, drawling his non-standard phraseology; the comedian, usually with a lousy script writer; and Captain Withit, with all the buzz words ("out of" for "left", "coming down" for "squawking ident", "thirteen two" for "one one three decimal two").

Nothing pleases these types more than being greeted by name on the air.

And then there is poor old Nervous Ned – convinced that ATC is peopled by man-eaters!

Maastricht Control in Central Europe had one operator who prided himself on being able to greet each aircraft with a cheery "good morning" in that crew's mother tongue.

An Aussie flying a French aircraft, hoping to ace him, came up with "Maastricht Air France vingt et un - Bon Jour". "G'day mate," the operator rejoined.

Although greetings such as "good morning" are non-standard, there may be a place for limited use of them to maintain relations between pilots and controllers. But they should be used sparingly.

The standard phrases are laid out in AIP/GEN and the VFR Flight Guide.

The problem with poor quality transmissions is that pilots tend to project onto the garble words they had expected to hear. The message might have been quite different.

My old morse code teacher from bygone days as an ATC cadet warned us against "journalising" plain language messages off the morse key.

He ended our test with a plain language statement, which we all got down confidently as: "This test is being conducted at the RAAF School of Radio, Ballarat". He then showed us the text he had sent. It had read: "This test is being conducted at the RAAF School of Rabbits, Ballarat."

Ray Vuillermin is a CASA Airlines Operations inspector based in Brisbane.