Maritime English Training for Non-native Speaking Mariners

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ABSTRACT

IMO officially promoted English as the language of the sea in the STCW 95 Convention and Code, adopted the ISM Code to reduce and eliminate communication failures and developed the SMCP for ensuring safety. In these circumstances the lecturers of Maritime English for non-native English speaking students face the task to meet the requirements of the new convention by means of reliable syllabi, classroom materials and techniques in order to facilitate learners to adequately master Maritime English. We need to take into account local training circumstances and ensure that international legislative requirements are met. A training system that works well in one country is not automatically successful when exported to a different environment. In our presentation, which is based on the expertise of Maritime English lecturers of Kyiv State Maritime Academy, we will consider the primary role of competence in general English while comprising Maritime English syllabus; another issue of our consideration is the communicative approach as the principal method applied to teaching and learning Maritime English, adopted in order to meet the specific communicative needs our learners will have on board ships. We will also view the concept of using simulators as an effective tool for Maritime English Teaching.

1. Introduction

English has been adopted by the IMO, officially, as the language of the sea. STCW 95 requires that every mariner must have an adequate knowledge of it. The legislation nowadays emphasizes the importance of the English language proficiency in relation to safety at sea. This is widely recognized at every level of shipping industry from legislative institutions to shipowners. In recent years a growing awareness of the necessity of choosing the best techniques in teaching Marine English has become evident. Lecturers should chose the best approach in teaching Marine English aiming to develop main language skills: oral and aural speech, grammar, reading and aural comprehension. As an international language, Maritime English is used as the means of communication in Maritime Industry between people often none of whom is a native user of the language. Thus any study of Marine English Language must include data on the forms and strategies employed by practicing people in Maritime industry who are non-native speakers of English. Clearly, Maritime English lecturers in a definite maritime educational establishment have a unique set of variables to work with, all of which influence the content, structure and method of local training.

In the circumstances when English is studied as a foreign language in an artificial bilingual environment, the problem of Marine English syllabus and principles of teaching will always be of great importance. Detailed syllabus & planning, good facilities, qualified & methodologically correct teaching are required to solve the problem of English language acquisition for non-native speaking mariners.

2. Facets of Maritime English

Maritime English can be divided into 4 main sections:

1/ General education in the English language

2/ The English used by those dealing with the navigation, safety communications, cargo operations, everything used for work of the deck department.

3/ The English used by those concerned with the main and auxiliary engines, the electrics, electronics — their operation and maintenance — everything used for work of the engineering department.

4/ The English used by those concerned with the commercial business of the merchant marine, Maritime Law procedures, insurance etc.

Let us consider the role of the students competence in General English. General education in the English language is necessary for all the students of ESP. Seafarers need to have good command of General English for the following reasons:

(1) General English is a necessary foundation for Maritime English because when the trainees come to the maritime content of the syllabus, they must have already covered all topics of General English and essential Grammar. Only being aware of the basic vocabulary, structure and phonology of the language, they pay grater attention to terminology, peculiarities of syntax and style.

(2) General English helps seafarers cope easier with all situations they face while serving aboard merchant ships, the more so if it is a multilingual and multinational crew.

(3) Since English is studied as a foreign language in an artificial bilingual environment under instruction, it turned out more helpful to start with a common core of General English and gradually pass over to Maritime English instead of intermingling them.

These reasons should be considered when composing English Language Programme for the whole period of study in the Maritime educational establishments.

3.Communicative Approach as the Basic Principle of Teaching Maritime English

Teaching Maritime English in Kyiv Maritime Academy and Kyiv Maritime Training Centre is based on the **Communicative approach** considered the most effective for professional and safety purposes practically in all higher educational establishments in Ukraine. Our programmes are designed to teach seafarers to communicate in English with confidence and fluency, to improve command of English grammar and extend the range of professional vocabulary.

Both Russian and Ukrainian proponents now see it as an approach (and not a method) that aims to (a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. However, there is no single text or authority on it, nor any single model that is universally accepted as authoritative.

Communicative Language Teaching implies the formation of phonetic, lexical, grammatical skills by involving learners into communicative situations that are close to the situations of real communication. This approach is aimed to the **practical usage** of the communicative skills. Hence the learning situations imitate real communication. We keep in mind that process of learning foreign languages cannot completely coincide with the process of real communication, so it s a question of highest possible approaching of studies to real life situations by means of:

a) communicative-oriented structure of a lesson;

b) communicative-motivated behavior of a teacher;

c) thorough selection of materials, topics, situations, handouts reflecting professional needs of students;

d) authenticity of materials *(that is, the language must be naturally generated by the students special purpose)*;

e) thorough selection of active and passive vocabulary and grammar;

f) situational oriented task instructions;

g) implementation of various reading strategies;

h) tolerance of error —*errors which do not impede successful communication must be tolerated*;

i) formation of intercultural competence

Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) contrast the major distinctive features of the Audiolingual Method and the Communicative Approach, according to their interpretation:

Audio-lingual *Communicative Approach*

Audio-lingual	Communicative Approach
1. Attends to structure and form more than meaning.	Meaning is paramount.
2. Demands memorization of structure-based dialogs.	Dialogs, if used, center around communicative functions and are not normally memorized
3. Language items are not necessarily contextualized.	Contextualization is a basic premise
4. Language learning is learning structures,	Language learning is learning to communicate.

sounds, or words.	
5. Mastery, or "over-learning" is sought.	Effective communication is sought.
6. Drilling is a central technique.	Drilling may occur, but peripherally.
7. Native-speaker-like pronunciation is sought.	Comprehensible pronunciation is sought.
8. Grammatical explanation is avoided.	Any device which helps the learners is accepted - varying according to their age, interest, etc.
9. Communicative activities only come after a long process of rigid drills and exercises.	Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning.
10. The use of the student's native language is forbidden.	Judicious use of native language is accepted where feasible.
11. Translation is forbidden at early levels.	Translation may be used where students need or benefit from it.
12. Reading and writing are deferred till speech is mastered.	Reading and writing can start from the first day, if desired.
13. The target linguistic system will be learned through the overt teaching of the patterns of the system.	The target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate.
14. Linguistic competence is the desired goal.	Communicative competence is the desired goal (i.e. the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately)
15. Varieties of language are recognized but not emphasized.	Linguistic variation is a central concept in materials and methodology.
16. The sequence of units is determined solely by principles of linguistic complexity.	Sequencing is determined by any consideration of content, function, or meaning which maintains interest.
17. The teacher controls the learners and prevents them from doing anything that conflicts with the theory	Teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language.
18. Language is habit so errors must be prevented at all costs	Language is created by the individual often through trial and error.
19. Accuracy, in terms of formal correctness, is a primary goal.	Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal: accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in context.
20. Students are expected to interact with the language system, embodied in machines or controlled materials.	Students are expected to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writings.
21. Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in the structure of the language.	Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language.

(1983: p.91-3)

Let us look upon the basic principles of Communicative Approach as applied to teaching Marine English.

Practical orientation is to be achieved by using **materials** that have the primary role of promoting communicative language use.

We consider task-based materials to be absolutely necessary for communicative teaching Marine English. All the activities are to be presented in the form of one-of-a-kind items: cue cards, activity cards, pair-communication practice materials, and student-interaction practice booklets. In pair-communication materials, there are typically two sets of material for a pair of students, each set containing different kinds of information. For example, such materials can assume different role relationship for the partners (e.g., an Officer and a Cadet on the bridge). Another example, the materials can provide information for the partners to fit their respective parts into a composite whole.

We agree with many proponents of Communicative Language teaching who advocate the use of authentic , from-life materials in the classroom. These might include language-based **realia**, such as signs, telexes, original ship documents or graphic and visual sources around which communicative activities can be built, such as maps, symbols, graphs, and charts.

Linguistic information should be chosen to be taught not simply because it exists, but rather on the basis of what contribution it can make to the performance of specific tasks which are both communicatively useful and relevant to the seafarers professional language needs.

Situational orientation of a lesson means that everything happening at the lesson should be close to real life situations. It is to be achieved, first of all, by situational and communicative nature of instructions to tasks. Explaining what is meant by this principle requires examples.

Non-communicative	Communicative
Read the article and answer the questions.	You are going to read an article about the importance of steam power to a shipping company. Read these questions then scan read the article to find the answers (Marlins Study Pack II)
Read the messages, answer these questions and write replies to the messages.	You are the Captain on Board a newly built container ship called the Meridian Star. You have just berthed and have a busy 24-hour period ahead in which all crew are required to assist in loading operations. You have to deal with the communications below. Read theses questions. Then read the messages. Write a telegram or letter in reply to your manager, describing the situation on board and explaining your proposed course of action. (Marlins Study Pack II)
Listen to the dialogue and answer the questions.	Listen to the dialogue. The Steward is telling the Catering officer about some news he has just heard on the radio. Tell why the Steward and Catering officer are worried. (Marlins Study Pack II)
Read the text and complete the gaps with appropriate words	Read the text. A specialist in cross-cultural issues is giving a talk to a group of shipping managers. Complete the gaps with appropriate words. (Marlins Study Pack II)

We suggest that classroom instructions incorporate the following features:
a)   opportunities for students to be exposed to real communication,
b)   opportunities for students to engage in using real communication
c)   activities which are meaningful to students and which will motivate them to become committed to sustaining that communication to accomplish a specific goal.

It should be pointed out that textbooks you use might not be obviously based on the Communicative approach. It is a teacher s skill that really matters in structuring their classes so as to provide opportunities for students to be actively engaged in real communication.

Of course, we admit that not all exercises can be made communicative-oriented. Especially it s difficult to transfer grammar into communicative-oriented tasks and activities. We propose that grammar instruction, within the limits of the possible, should be offered as a supplement to, but not instead of real communicative experiences.

Situational orientation of the lesson is also to be achieved by **communicative-oriented structure of the lesson** itself. We agree with the methodologists who propose that lesson should incorporate the following basic components: 1) a general theme (e.g., Visiting a crewing agency: asking for information) and theme presentation, 2) a task analysis for thematic development (e.g. understanding the message, asking questions to obtain clarification of specification, taking notes, ordering and presenting information etc.), 3) a practice situation description (A seafarer asks to see the Director of the crewing agency. He does not have an appointment. What information should the secretary get from him?), 4) a

stimulus presentation (e.g., a model conversation scripted or/and on the tape), 5) checking up comprehension, 6) conversational activity — *there are many types of them in Communicative methodology* (e.g., You are the manager of a crewing agency. A seafarer asks to see your Director. He does not have an appointment. Gather the necessary information from him and relay the message to the Director), etc. Of course, this model does not claim to be universal, and teachers are encouraged to display resourcefulness, talent and classroom management skills.

4. Peculiarities of SMCP Teaching

IMO developed the SMCP to ENSURE SAFETY FIRST. Following the guidelines included in the introduction that t he SMCP builds on a basic knowledge of the English language   in a simplified version of Maritime English to reduce grammatical, lexical and idiomatic varieties to a tolerable minimum , it is compulsory to teach them after getting acquainted with the conventions of general English. It is also preferable to incorporate them in the comprehensive syllabus after teaching the general maritime English topics so that students are already familiar with at least half of the words and phrases in the glossary. However, special attention should be given to GMDSS standard messages and VTS standard phrases as well as the application of message markers and the patterns they follow. This is of utmost importance in order to reflect present Maritime English language usage on board vessels and in ship-to-shore/ship-to-ship communications and to comply with IMO VTS Guidelines. Students must be acquainted with the block language which sparingly uses, or frequently omits, the function words *the, a/an, is/are,* avoids contracted forms, provides fully worded answers to "yes/no"-questions and basic alternative answers to sentence questions, provides *one* phrase for *one* event, etc. They must know that it is only the SMCP that feature such a simplified kind of English and get used to it.

5.Simulator-assisted Language Training. *Full Mission Bridge simulator as a tool for language training*

There already exist some methodological research as to the usage of GMDSS simulator in process of teaching Maritime English. Full mission bridge simulators have nearly perfected the transfer of learning and training since they allow the student to transfer the learned knowledge (of relevant disciplines), skills and training almost in their entirety.
Since the academic year 2002/2003 in Kyiv State Maritime Academy we are running an experimental programme, aiming to check the effectiveness of Full Mission Bridge Simulator as an effective tool in teaching Maritime English for cadets of 4th and 5th years of study (Navigational Department). It is early to speak of any results so let us consider only some aspects we took into account while organizing the experiment.

First of all we would like to mention that simulator-assisted lesson is the last one in the thematic lessons block aiming at recapitulation of the set of definite topics (e.g. *Pilotage, Steering and Sailing Rules, Navigation in Extreme Conditions* etc). Simulator-assisted English classes usually takes a period of 2 (for some topics — 3) academic hours. All the simulator-based lessons are inserted into Maritime English Syllabus so that they form an integrated training session with ordinary classes.

The rule of exercise states that those things most often repeated are best remembered. A vivid and exciting experience sometimes teaches more than usual routine lessons. Hence for achieving our purpose we chose combination of simulation exercises with ROLE PLAY as a main training technique. Before the role-play, the objectives for it must be explained. After asking for volunteers, selecting the role-players and the observers, the trainer together with Maritime English lecture should issue the role-play brief verbally of in writing. A thorough briefing of all procedures that are to be accomplished during should be provided.

Maritime English lecturer works together with a trainer to compose the necessary kind of exercises to make them suitable for imitating real communication and directed towards the purpose of language learning. The mere emulation of reality teaches nothing. It goes without saying that the training objectives and outcomes must be clearly stated and understood.
Simulator-assisted training Maritime English training is a matter of arguments and on-going search. However nobody can deny that simulator-based education is important element in developing the total competency of a future watchkeeper.

6.   The Lecturer s Professional Competence

What is Maritime English Lecturer s professional competence consists of? It incorporates Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes. Knowledge consists of (a) knowledge of the English Language and linguistic competence, (b) knowledge of syllabus designing and types and (c) knowledge of methods, techniques and approaches in ELT. Professional skills consist of the ability (a) how to design syllabus materials, (b) how to implement methods and techniques in class and (b) how to improve skills of the students in speaking, reading, writing and listening; and Attitudes means (a) knowledge of own students motivation and their needs (b) to establishment of mutual understanding with them, for which of course you (c) have to have certain knowledge in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics.

The lecturer s role should not be limited to that of passive recipient of an approved method, text or syllabus. Rather, the lecturer s role and skills should be developed to ensure that he/she can act as a critically aware and well informed judge of how training tools and methods can be used to best effect. Lecturers in Maritime English have a very difficult task to fulfill. Ultimately, however, success depends on the expertise, enthusiasm of the lecturers themselves and their desire for the constant self-improvement.

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