

TOUGH CHALLENGES AND REAL ANSWERS FOR MARITIME ENGLISH IN THE 21ST CENTURY FOR DECK & ENGINE ROOM CADETS

–Hope for none-native speakers, worldwide

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Abstract “Vision 21” concerned a plan and looking into the future. For this we look back a little and to the president at the time, Dr. Kiyoshi Hara. He laid out a few points in his paper Perspective of Maritime Universities-Challenge of Kobe University of Mercantile Marine. Among the aspects include the target to make to “make a social contribution” and basic education that includes “cross-cultural communication.” An aim is also expressed “to play a key role in maritime universities over the world.” There is a deep desire “for developing international maritime education network (for example IAMU). As stated “Individual capability with global perspective for instructors, staffs and students ... with an international mind and social contribution ... We will make every effort so that the new Faculty of Maritime Science will play an important role.”[IAMU News’ Issue 8, January 2003, pp 84-86] It is the goal of this paper to further the noble aims expressed.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is increasingly asking for Basic International English to be the foundation of Maritime English. It has been my responsibility to find an answer to a problem which has not been successfully dealt with clean across some one hundred years, or so. Indeed, since the founding of our institution. I understand that this may be the case in other non-English speaking, maritime institutions around the world. The question is how to get from here to there? This paper will attempt to give a lead, here.

The maritime world has always led in the globalization of our world. Incidentally, it still does. So, the world maritime establishment is looking to us to find answers. This paper will suggest a radical, new approach which can answer this, the greatest challenge we face in our field: for our students’ to gain the competency in the Language of the Sea.

Keywords maritime English; basic English; peerless maritime education; appeth of tar; Oxford English Dictionary

0 Introduction

.1 Current Situation

It has been my honour to have been the native “English speaker” at what was the former Japan National Maritime University-Kobe (KUMM). Last year this distinguished institution was merged with Kobe University, where we now form the Department of Maritime Sciences.

What with the demographic turning-point having been reached in Japan, and other issues, the student population has been diminishing for some time now. So, in recent days our Fukae campus feels sadly empty. The students that we do have are increasingly spread between the faculties of *Maritime Technology Management, Maritime Transportation Systems and Marine Engineering*. There are a surprising number of international students with us; friends from Uruguay, Panama, Rumania, Vietnam, Indonesia, Taiwan and China, to name but a few. We also run master level courses, and some are going for doctorates. Indeed, one of my students, the very second PhD graduate from this Japanese university was from Dalian, China!

.2 The Most Special Opportunity for students

An important part is the Sea Training Institute, which includes six of the finest specially designed training ships in the world; among them being the *Nippon Maru* and *Kayo Maru*. Perhaps we can agree, two of the most beautiful ships-sailing barques-in the world. Indeed, non other than Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, wrote to us here to say exactly that!¹In 2005 *Kayo Maru* was heavily damaged in a storm. This included a helicopter lift off -- lucky students!]

Our part of the training process includes physical fitness, and the students are a pretty fit bunch. For example: the current champion cutter crew-ladies-that is of All Japan, happens to be one of ours! Every summer the boys’ cutter club makes a voyage in an open boat. This can be for up to 2 weeks. Peerless maritime education, challenge and adventure. We also have a few sleek rowing 8’s. Some of the heartiest of students (girls as well as boys) make up about 10% of the student body. Some manage the huge challenge of swimming two hours in the *Akashi Kaikyo*. They are under the charge of our champion swimmer, Prof. Homma. We also have specialized clubs such as yachting, this under the one time *Fastnet* Atlantic racer, Prof. Yamashita. Some years back one of our number dingy achieved the national dingy sailing championship finals.¹This was in the early 60s. Matsuo Kimura went on to reach captain’s rank and from time to time he talks to the young students of “the Shosen Spirit!” By that he means the Spirit of the Sea. It is, as it always has been courage, adventure and dreams.

1 The problem

The maritime aspect of Maritime English alone, in isolation, consists of perhaps a few hundred terms and formed expressions. No problem here; they have that down pretty well. So it is a handsome picture; indeed so. The Japanese maritime training establishment is second to none, and in almost every part save one; that is English.

Our English level here in Japan is very low. At any rate few of our students come to us with much spoken English, and maritime English is almost only a spoken one. It is not unfair to say-and I have heard this-that our students, bright and energetic as they are, are the “worst” in the maritime world! [It could be true. Current proficiency, I estimate at 5%, if that.] This is the only major flaw in the otherwise exemplary maritime programme for Japanese marine officers. This is what we can call the “spoiling of the ship for an ‘appeth of tar.”

“Don’t spoil the ship for an ‘appeth of tar”

{Expression: old English origin. Derived from the early maritime English of Great Britain, and has entered the full English language as a widely understood truism. Meaning-total system failure for the smallest of reasons.}

2 Causes for failure

Why does it continue to be unaddressed in any real way? I will now address this problem.

2.1 Why is this so

There is a medley of reasons, including that it is not really necessary in Japan. After all the complex Japanese language is-in size-to the order of number 6, internationally. My students do have quite a bit of writing, although little hearing and few proper sentences. Whatever the hopes (and the advertising!) our English classes are based on the premise that our lessons, per say, amount to little more than 18 hours per year. These are thinly spread across 14 weeks, or so. What can be expected then, for the student, marooned as he/she is, often in vast high school style classes? And for such time as equals the flight between New Kansai and JFK, New York! Can this possibly make any genuine difference? Is there in fact a better way? The answer is “yes.”

2.2 Cause for hope

The world of English often seems to focus on the higher mountains. For example: we can say CNN, TV News (that anyway is high speed and with an odd, ‘new word’ vocabulary). Newspapers, some running to a 25,000 word vocabulary, and yes, TOIEC! None of this need concerns us. The illustrious OED, the Oxford English Dictionary estimates, and tells us, that Basic English is a plateau of some 5,000 words. That can be our lodestar.

2.3 Hope envisaged

Most all of my Japanese students do have 2,500 words, or so. That is half of the 5,000 word definition for Basic International English, the good old OED! Good. We can utilize this. A new approach can move confidently “Full Steam Ahead” They are, most all, already halfway there!

3 Examples and solutions

3.1 (Practical) Example I

Student A (one of my first year students) could not respond to a standard:

“Good morning.”

“*Wakaranai?*” (I don’t know?)

However, as they so often were at KUMM the boy had spirit. And so he joined my group in America. This would include time at the California Maritime Academy. Here, my students were lucky enough to be allowed to berth aboard *Golden Bear*. Now this same boy, along with some others, was rather good at soccer. {You may recall, that Japan reached the last 8 in the Korea/Japan World Cup 2002} So he joined the CMA soccer club and were some involved in a practise game. After the game, went and swam to the buoy, perhaps 3 cables off shore. (I thought to try myself. However, I felt better on it. Sure I could reach the buoy, but I very much doubted I could get back again!) At any rate, the last time I saw this student, in California, he was on the phone. Talking to a local girl, he was, and in perfect English sentences!!

“*Wakarimas!*” (I understand!)

3.2 Example II

Student B was one of my third year students. He could not be understood, that is whatever he said. In this case we were together in Labrador, Canada. This young man, who was also a Boy Scout leader, was having a tough time. Amongst other things there was seldom opportunity to smoke, and had no more cigarettes during his flights halfway across the world! However, this sort of thing, led to constant interaction between him and the English speakers everywhere now about him. From this, and constant repetition-and desperation(!) began to give him the cadences of English. He began to hear. He naturally slowed down, and by end he was translating Japanese into English, for me!

3.3 (From China) Example III

Student C was from China, name Tei Ho. He started out with some English, but by end of his formal education he would be fluent. In Year 200 he joined the Japanese cadets in Alaska, and along with them earned the title ‘Companion of Peace.’ (For peace he brought along with him the red flag of the People’s Republic of China, and this remained with us for all future activities. Tei Ho went on to get a masters degree in the UK. Currently he is working within British Government Marine institutions.

3.4 “Breaking Through” into Basic International English

Over the years there has been towards one hundred students to have joined me in various adventures, or “gone foreign” as they might say. Adventure in fact forms quite a bit of the activities undergone in connection with my other research. I advocate we harness that great power of youth, and building it into the (reformed) marine officer language course. But not like any other course that can be found anywhere else.

As regard specialized (and expensive) courses in English-I say “who needs ‘em?” You see the central answer to our problem is not classes, it is fostering young human friendship via a changed, international environment. That means above all else living together in standard student accommodation; nothing special. I do however expect all students to join a club of the institution where they will be lodged; probably sports, or some other, based perhaps on a hobby. It might be noted that in such as in UK, the biggest membership grouping of all, with 2 millions members, and it is in, can you believe bird watching: If we are flexible enough, our wonderful students can

become among the best in the maritime world. And theirs will be a dream of a lifetime.

Both Student A and B spent a total of 3 weeks, only, outside of Japan. Bearing in mind that each student has to the order of a 2,500 word English vocabulary; then I estimate that an unbroken 20 weeks is the optimum in breaking through into Basic International English. That being so, then across the 20 weeks, would mean 12 words a day, memorized to bring up to the requisite 5,000 word English vocabulary. This would give our students the vocabulary that we can really, and dynamically, build our Maritime English upon.

Also, a diary will be written everyday (in English) and read out loud to the new friends. They, usually happily and willingly, will correct the small basic sentences of our student. Who will then, each day rewrite the diary entries and re-read them correctly out loud again. Given the full 20 weeks, I estimate that the majority will breakthrough into Basic English. Never again will they hesitate, nor will they need look back. Theirs will be an adventure and envied by ALL the other students in their home country!

3.5 The Weakness of Testing

It is notoriously difficult to get meaningful *results* with spontaneous communication, where a word-or even a gesture-can hold more true meaning than a full lecture. How to quantify magic? Testing comes first to mind. However, even here they have problems. For example I recently heard that TOIEC are considering changes in the light that a German test-taker with excellent English received a result in the 400s; whilst a successful test-taker getting in the 800s could not communicate much at all. He was Japanese. For professionals, my peers, to best consider, I would suggest pre and post comparative results in camera. This will allow us the best objective measuring, and for all to see.

4 Consideration

Wherever our students were to go, it must be out of their home country. In the case of my students, of course Japan. It is by no means necessary that it need be an English speaking country. Ideally, it would be where youth culture is strongest; that points to UK. The great museums are there, there. And in Britain they are without equal, and for the most part, I believe, still free. However, pretty much anywhere will do. For even in countries without an English language tradition, communicating will all be done in Basic.

4.1 Call to Action

My estimate on individual student success in “breaking through” into what is the basis within which Maritime English lie (Basic International English) is half, or better than. With this reform programme then yes, the majority will succeed. By that I mean a minimum of 51%. (I would hope for even better than that.) And remember, this is up from the current derisory 5% level. In this happy crew I also include the seeming least able of students. I note: that of our current student body, some of the best do better than those with higher scores on the Common Entrance Examination (CEE)] Never mind the so-called ‘best’ -- I am also looking at the so-called ‘worst.’ Give them an environment where they can see daylight, then they will amaze you.

4.2 To the Secure the Future

We first need adequate empirical data; that means establishing a working example, and somewhere in the maritime world. A full report with empirical detail could then follow. We would also need assistance, funding for airfares and the costs associated with dormitory living. This, in whichever international environment that we would eventually commence this experimental programme.

4.3 Timing

There is active planning toward the Fukae campus becoming a Graduate school for the maritime sciences; this starting as soon as April 2008. This might be the time to kick this programme off. A graduate school cannot go on giving high school type lessons. Reform here, at any rate, is a must.

5 Conclusion

Basic International English is the bedrock of Maritime English and some solid, real use of it would form a powerful, world-class tugboat, which indeed could pull their ship of life into confident and competent Maritime English. I conclude, and based on my large past experience with taking Japanese cadets (and one Chinese) abroad, that we can fix the 'English problem' once and for all. Without this kind of commitment from us, including sufficient time to create a critical mass in language exposure, then we will not succeed.

Join us then, sister maritime universities and institutions in countries without a tradition in English; join the splendid Japanese students at Kobe University-Maritime, and together we can resolve this problem once and for all. Give our young students, bright with dreams the chance to become fully competent and confident international Seafarers. We can do nothing less.

Appreciations

I wish to express my great appreciation to Professor M. Sales, Dean-University of Guam, and the brave students of Kobe who agreed to join our international experiments, who said "Yes" to adventure-*the Shosen spirit!*

Reference

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