

MARITIME ENGLISH CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION IN GLOBAL MARITIME CONTEXT

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Abstract With more and more multi-lingual and multicultural crews joining the transnational seafarers' maritime community, their competence in maritime English becomes a public concern. There is a need for maritime English lecturers to use some effective pedagogies. During the process of maritime English teaching in DMU, teachers found some teaching and learning problems relating to four macro skills in the English language communications. Regarding proper teaching techniques, suggestions are made to teach maritime English.

Keywords globalization; maritime English; maritime English teaching approach

0 Introduction

In the context of global maritime industry, the shortage of seafarers in the world makes it necessary to muster different nationalities on board. The cross-cultural labor mobility makes many maritime English instructors aware that getting proper teaching pedagogy will ensure the quality of the cadets in the global seafarers' community.

Maritime English, the language of the sea, is needed in today's shipping industry. The demands for competent seafarers require their proficiency in understanding and using maritime English. The mixture of seafarers' different cultures makes maritime English a compulsory linguistic medium in aspect of the safety of life at sea, ship property, pollution preventions, etc. People commonly admit knowledge and skills of maritime English can ensure the effectiveness of communication between English speaking seafarers and non-English speaking seafarers; and between seafarers and offshore personnel. To some extent, guarantee of safety at sea relies on seafarers' communication in maritime English. Proper command of maritime English is not only for the essentials of seafarers but also for the appropriate operation of ship.

Although IMO has officially adopted maritime English as the language of maritime industry, there is a clear necessity for ensuring seafarers to gain maritime English communication skills in the current globalizing world shipping market. Most of maritime institutes are aware that mastering communication skills is one of the important components which ensures the safety at sea. In order to cultivate the high-quality seafarers, maritime English instructors should focus on teaching the particular terminology and communication skills that include listening, speaking, reading, writing as required by IMO conventions in the international shipping industry. MET institutions should perfect the syllabus of teaching maritime English; and maritime English instructors should find

effective ways to teach the language. All these will benefit maritime English education in the globalization of maritime industry.

Through analysis of the situation of maritime English teaching in China, the paper is aimed at enriching the teaching approaches in MET institutions. It reveals difficulties in maritime English teaching, with focus on how to improve four communicative skills in maritime English teaching. Maritime English lecturers play an essential part in realizing the goal of maritime English teaching. The quality of ME teaching decides whether the cadets will become competent seafarers to meet requirements of IMO Conventions, and whether they will be communicating freely in the global maritime community.

1 Globalization and Maritime English Teaching

Globalization is a multilevel phenomenon. It is a process of globalizing all aspects of social life in the world. As Stromquist (2000: 3) explains, “a contemporary term that entered the consciousness of most people by now, is a phenomenon that comprises multiple and drastic changes in all areas of social life, particularly economics and culture.” The globalization in maritime industry is broadening. In the last decades, with the development of economics and ever-changing world seafarer labor markets, world seafarers are in serious shortage, multi-lingual and multi-cultural crews have become main composition of world merchant ships. About two thirds of the world merchant fleet are composed of several nationalities. The fast-growing global shipping community requires multi-lingual and cross-cultural cooperation(Horck, 2005). Removing language barriers has become more and more significant in assisting communication in global community. Maritime English, the language at sea, as well as the guarantee of the safety of life, property and ship operation, becomes the need of competent seafarers. The importance of maritime English teaching has become a growing concern. Therefore, MET institutions should give high priority of maritime English teaching, and have enough preparation of competent seafarers among internationalisation of working groups in global maritime field.

2 Difficulties in Learning and Teaching Maritime English

The intensifying need of good knowledge and skills of maritime English is one of characteristics in global maritime field. Studies have shown that Maritime English instructors and students in DMU (Dalian Maritime University) have difficulties in the process of teaching and learning maritime English. The major problem for cadets is that their learning motivation is low. One of the reasons is that some of them are not aware of the importance of the future use of maritime English which relates with their opportunities of getting better life and job performance. On the other hand, some of the students lack in enough courage to speak English publicly, especially when they conduct communication with foreigners. They always worry about the mistakes they will make during the communication conversations. As a result, they become silent ones during the learning process; and have barriers in speaking English psychologically. Hence, these block their way to be a competent seafarer.

The result of MSA (Maritime Safety Administration) evaluation examination every year also reveals some unsatisfactory results. Some students cannot express clearly, whether in maritime English or everyday English. Some of them convey the information in long and perplexing Chinglish sentences. For example, in role-playing the conversation about *Making an Appointment*, a student spoke: “I will go to the school gate to meet you at seven o’clock” instead of speaking: “I will be there at seven o’clock” in a concise and idiomatic way. Another difficulty students met in learning is that they cannot

memorize the maritime vocabularies due to their lack of basic knowledge of vocabularies. For example, in memorizing the technical terms relating to cargo handling gear, the phrase “*standing guy*”, if students do not have enough knowledge of vessel structure and equipment, the confusing homonyms will make them understand it in a mistaken way.

To make it worse, very few students learn how to listen actively. When some students listened to materials, they regard the vocabularies in the sentence as separate ones, ignoring stress, rhythm, and intonation. For example, in listening the following conversation about the PSC inspection, if they ignore the stressed content words: *take, oil sample, oil tank, send, crew, accompany, sure, possible, fetch samples*, they will not understand what they are required to do.

A: I will take an oil sample from your oil tank. Could you send a crew to accompany me?

B: Sure, I will accompany you. If possible, I will fetch samples for you.

In this way, they cannot take in a language, but only memorize the fixed pattern and could not use it to communicate freely if they were put in a different environment.

As to the productive skill—writing which requires comprehensive knowledge of English to produce, the students have some problems in writing due to lack of some knowledge of English.

At the same time, there are pedagogical issues that concern us. The proper selection of text books and maritime English teaching materials is one of the primaries in commanding maritime English. If the students learn the outdated textbook, they would not keep up with new development in shipping industry, not mention some new technical terms. What is more, the quantity of academic hours provided by the curriculum for maritime English teaching is not sufficient though we have almost two year maritime English teaching and learning. Therefore the students do not have enough practise on board. Consequently, they lost the opportunity to practise what they have learned at school. Another issue that exists in MET in China is that experienced instructors are in demand due to the increased recruitments of cadets. Based on these problems, suggestions are made in the following section.

3 Suggestions for Classroom Instruction

Maritime English instructors do find it indispensable to rely on the communicative resources of maritime English for effectively teaching the knowledge and skills required by IMO. In Dalian Maritime University, the communicative approach should be employed to teach maritime English. To get competent seafarers, our programs for cadets should be aimed at helping them to communicate in English confidently and fluently, develop their language skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing. The whole teaching process should be thoroughly considered, including the selection of textbooks and teaching materials, classroom management, and assignments after school and evaluation examination. All these should meet the requirements of IMO Conventions.

In order to arouse the students’ interests in classroom learning, the instructors should not always emphasize the difficulties. As for some students, to understand the different conceptual ideas in another language already makes their memory load very high. Although the teacher’s job is to remind the students of them being realistic about difficulties in studying, the side-effect undermines their confidence (Michael and Jimmie, 1999).

To improve cadets' communicative skills, the instructors should put listening first, for the input of good listening materials will contribute to the language acquisition. The instructors should use global listening and sub-skills of listening in the teaching process to improve the students' ability to communicate. Tape listening and multi-media are useful in assisting their practice in learning. The lecturers should do some related computer software uploading the DMU Website to facilitate the cadets' studying. Thus, the students will be getting their input to their intake. As for the selections of listening materials, it is wise for the maritime English lecturer to choose different English varieties which closely relate to their future job. Thus they will arouse the students' interests. Therefore the cadets will have good preparation for their future exposure among the multi-lingual set ups.

Speaking a foreign language is a very complex skill. To improve the students' ability to speak, the concise, and understandable SMCP should be the first selection in training the students to operate the ship and handle other problems that occur in shipping. For non-native speakers, SMCP is a short-cut to communication with other language speakers on board. As in Dalian Maritime University, the maritime English lecturers should use the resources of maritime English materials, such as parts of *Sailing Directions*, the textbooks by MSA and textbooks edited by the experienced lecturers themselves. In practicing these teaching materials, the lecturers should give the students some authentic situation first, and then require the students to do role playing. All the conversations in role-playing must be natural. While the students are doing role-playing, the lecturers should not pay too much attention to their pronunciation and structures, because frequent corrections by the lecturers undermine students' confidence. In order to make the student become confident in speaking, the lecturers should not correct mistakes until the students finish the complete task. In this way, the students can use the language to communicate freely in the global community.

As for the students' poor command of maritime English vocabularies, the lecturers should assign some students home reading tasks. Besides reading some textbooks, we should also employ some maritime English-based realia, such as original ship documents, charts, notices to mariners, and parts of sailing directions, especially the sailing directions of South China Sea, UK, Holland and America which can exemplify some sailing routes. Through these reading context, it will be easy for students to memorize some vocabularies. Tests should be designed to check the results of home-readings, so the lecturers will know whether the students read these materials or not, and to what extent they have read. Then, the lecturers will be getting to know how to guide the students to read and how to improve teaching techniques. Maritime lecturers should also employ part of maritime English -based realia in classroom, such as telexes, original ship documents or charts, etc to arouse the students' interest of reading. Gradually, comprehensive reading will broaden the students' horizon, and enlarge the students' vocabularies. In this way, the students can gain the knowledge of documents which can contribute to the required English level of competent seafarers internationally.

Although it is not easy for cadets to master writing skills, The writing model of business letters, notices and marine note of sea protest should be given to the students. The lecturers should give the students some writing assignments in order to improve their writing ability. On the other hand, lecturers should collect realia of business letters, notices and marine note of sea protest, etc. from shipping companies and ask the students to point out some advantages and disadvantages of the

writings. Gradually, the cadets will know how to write the correct ones. Writing skills are necessary for cadets to become competent seafarers.

Generally speaking, the syllabus of maritime English teaching in MET institutions in China should provide enough academic hours to teach maritime English. Enough time will ensure reinforcement of training the students maritime English. Consequently, the students will obtain more competence in maritime English in the long term.

Measures should also be taken to update the experience of the Maritime English lecturers. On board training is essential for those from non-native backgrounds. As STCW requires the quality of maritime English instructors: "...all instructors, supervisors and assessors are appropriately qualified for particular types and levels of training or assessment of competence of seafarers either on board or ashore..." In Dalian Maritime University, the team of maritime English instructors is composed of some specialists, former seafarers, and literature and linguistics graduates. DMU should provide some maritime English lecturers or would-be maritime English lecturers good research environments through inter-college and transnational academic communication. In this way, more and more literature and linguistics graduates will gain more knowledge of maritime English teaching, and will join the group of maritime English teaching. Therefore, MET institutions will have competent maritime English lecturers to facilitate Maritime English education.

4 Conclusion

Problems in listening and speaking, vocabulary memorizing and the lack of knowledge of writing block the cadets from becoming competent seafarers. The lack of updated maritime English instructors hinders the cadets from becoming competent seafarers in the globalized maritime community. Suggestions were put forward with a view facilitating maritime English teaching.

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