

REFORMATION OF MARITIME ENGLISH INSTRUCTION IN CHINA UNDER MANILA AMENDMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The Manila Amendments have established stricter, more unified standards for global crew training, certificating and watch keeping. With respect to the seamen' English competency, the Manila Amendment puts forward new requirements, including the promotion of English communication ability, company's responsibility towards the allocation of the seamen' duty. Low ability to communicate with foreign seamen in English became a key restrict factor for Chinese crews walking to international labour market. Therefore it is significant to analyze the problems and look for solutions that could be taken to improve Chinese seafarers' marine English for communication. This paper abstracts some new standards from STCW78/10 Amendments, analyses the present situation of maritime English teaching in China and finds that measures, such as optimizing the allocation of marine English instructor, setting teaching content specifically, improving teaching methods, reforming the assessment mode, creating good English learning atmosphere, should be taken to improve English communication ability of Chinese crews.

Keywords: *the Manila Amendments, marine English instruction, communication, Chinese seamen.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the highly globalized international shipping context, the STCW Convention has been regarded as one of the most important conventions adopted by International Maritime Organization (IMO). After the implementation of STCW78/95, with the economic globalization, ships trend to be huger, more-specialized and high-speed. This requires stricter marine environment protection. Meanwhile, deeper and broader application of new technology requires higher standard of maritime training and watch keeping. Furthermore, the serious pirates' attacks become strong challenges to the maritime security, this as well requires higher standard.

The IMO, on the basis of factors mentioned above, after more than four years' complete modification and deliberations, convened the Manila Conference to officially adopt the Manila Amendment of STCW78/95 (hereinafter referred as "Manila Amendment"), establishing stricter, more unified standards for global crew training, certificating and watchkeeping. This will inevitably play a more important role in protecting the safety of life at sea, maritime security and marine environment.

With respect to the seamen' English competency, the Manila Amendment puts forward new requirements, including the promotion of English communication ability, company's responsibility to allocation the seamen' duty and official start of the SMCP (Standard Marine Communication Phrase). As an important communicative tool, maritime English differs from Basic English by its professional specialty and un-replaceable feature. But certain investigation shows that low ability to communicate with foreign seamen in English become a key restrict factor for Chinese crews walking to international labour market.

This paper, by using qualitative research methods including analysis, comparison, statistic, etc., abstracts some new standards from STCW78/10 Amendments; as well analyses the present situation of maritime English teaching in China and finds that the allocation of teaching resource does not satisfy the need of English teaching, the content is not reasonable to certain extent.

2. NEW REQUIREMENTS OF MANILA AMENDMENT AS REGARDS SEAMEN'S ENGLISH COMPETENCY

With the rapid development of world shipping and promotion of internationalization of seamen, seamen's English communication ability, as well as their effective communication ability are crucial. The IMO poses some new requirements or standards in the Manila Amendment against the internal requirement to seamen's English competency under new situation.

2.1 Shipping Companies should ensure their seamen have good ability of oral communication

In A-I/14 of the Manila Amendments, paragraph 7 says "at all times on board its ships there shall be effective oral communication in accordance with Chapter V, regulation 14, paragraph 3 and 4 of the International Convention for the Safety of Life an Sea, 1974 (SOLAS), as amended". This new standard requires the shipping companies to modify their standard of seafarer training quality system and join in the assessment of seafarers' English communication ability. This directly concerns the quality of Chinese graduates majoring on navigation and their prospective of employment. According to this new standard, navigation graduates should have the ability of oral English

communication, which poses higher requirements on Chinese maritime English instruction.

2.2 *Seamen's Ability to Keep Effective Communication with VTS*

In Table A-II/1, "Navigation at the operational level", under column of competency to "maintain a safe navigational watch", a mandatory standard of "The use of reporting in accordance with the General Principles for Ship Reporting Systems and with VTS procedures" is added. Meanwhile, in Table A-II/2, "Navigation at the management level", under column of competency of "Plan a voyage and conduct navigation", it is newly required to ensure reporting in accordance with the general principles for Ship Reporting Systems and with VTS procedures. In the procedure of using VTS, the Manila Amendments delete the pre-used Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary and officially and completely start the usage of Standard Marine Communication Phrase which is simpler, more effective, more normative and standard than the former; and is helpful for the VTS centre to the effective communication in terms of inquiring navigation situation, reminding vessels to comply with the route regulation and publication of weather warning. However, because of the different language used in various VTS, it is natural to use English as communicating language which requires higher ability of synthetic application of English and oral communication.

Besides, under the column of "Bridge Resource Management", the Manila Amendments added paragraph 2 of "effective communication" and accordingly set up the standard of competency assessment, i.e. "Communication is clearly and unambiguously given and received". This is the first time for the Manila Amendments to set the standard of "unambiguity" of effective communication which the main implication is the quality of such communication, and is of higher requirement than that of "understood" in previous STCW78/95.

2.3 *Emphasizing seamen's English communication ability of effective communication*

In Table A-VI/1-4, an item of "Contribute to effective communications on board ship" is added, which requires that seafarers should have not only the ability of regular working conversation but also the ability of team cooperation and routine communication. As to the specific standard of competency, it requires that seafarers could "understand the principles of, and barriers to, effective communication between individuals and teams within the ship"; "establish and maintain effective communications". The realization of this new requirement depends in large on English as a vector which means good oral English communicative strategy and pragmatic competency of seamen. This concerns two subjects of "Navigational English Listening and Speaking" and "Navigational Trans-cultural Communication". It requires as well revising the existing curriculum system of marine English, their teaching

contents, the syllabus and assessment guidelines in time to meet the requirement of the Manila Amendments.

2.4 *Enhancing seamen's actual application of English while working on board*

Under the part of "Goals of an ECDIS training programme" in Manila Amendments, "The ECDIS trainee should be able to ... state the potential errors of displayed data and the usual errors of interpretation, and explain why ECDIS should not be relied upon as the sole reliable aid to navigation". Meanwhile, in section A-VIII/1, it is required that "the schedules shall be established in a standardized format in the working language or languages of the ship and in English".

This new requirement shows that the seafarers should have the ability of effectively and synthetically applying English under working context. Therefore, in the course of marine English instruction and training students should be required to be able to apply English to resolve problems when working, by means of simulation, to promote their application ability to meet the new standard.

3. PROBLEMS OF EXISTING MARINE ENGLISH INSTRUCTION IN CHINA

3.1 *Un-satisfaction of allocation of teachers to the needs of professional English education*

In present Chinese marine English teaching, majority of the marine English education is undertaken by those teachers with little or without any maritime background, which sometimes leads to simple translation or interpretation of professional knowledge. Some of the teachers, at the same time, undertake the Basic English and marine English education. The heavy work results in that they do not have enough time and spirit to trace and research the development of professional knowledge, let alone to improve the way of teaching English for Specific Purpose (ESP).

It is originally required that two different teaching methods should be utilized respectively for Basic English and professional English. The rapid shift from one kind of teaching method to another is quite hard for teachers taking Basic English and professional English simultaneously. This definitely leads not only to inadequate demonstration of systematic language and cultural knowledge in Basic English teaching but also the shortage of cultivation of application ability of professional language in marine English teaching.

3.2 *Unreasonable setting of teaching content*

With the rapid development of shipping industry, navigational instruments and equipments, together with navigational technology and relevant conventions are continuously updating, whereas the present textbook of marine English in China seldom catches up with such changes as STCW, ISM, ECDIS, BRM and so on. Some of the contents of the textbook have no relation to the actual situation.

Another problem concerning this aspect is more attention being posed on reading while less on listening and speaking. As it is well known, seamen's professional character determines they should have the ability of English listening, speaking, reading and writing. As a working language, English should originally be applied to the routine communication. In order to ensure the navigational safety and the practice, seamen's English ability should firstly satisfy the communication. The present situation, however, is that more and more attention is put on the reading of marine English. Moreover, reciting the marine new words and expressions becomes the main task of marine English teaching for the purpose of passing the relevant competency exam.

3.3 Phenomenon of exam-oriented education in marine English teaching

Now marine English in China is one of the subjects which are necessary to take exam for the competency certificate of seamen. Majority of maritime universities or colleges, therefore, put the passing rate of exam as the important referencing indicator to assess and judge the departments or teachers, by which makes the "passing rate" the common goal of teachers and students. So teachers spend much of their time with all kinds of ways or modes, searching for the latest and most complete question bank, demonstrating and interpreting to the students; meanwhile students spend most of their time reciting the question bank and its answers. Although majority of students pass the competency exam, their English ability is still not truly upgraded so that could not be competent for their working on board after graduation.

4. SUGGESTIONS TO REFORM THE MARINE ENGLISH INSTRUCTION IN CHINA

4.1 Optimizing the allocation of marine English instructor

Regarding the advantage and disadvantage of whether the course of marine English is delivered by maritime specialized teachers or by Basic English teachers, the authors' point of view is that maritime specialized teachers have abundant on-board experience; therefore they have more advantages on marine professional knowledge, whereas the Basic English teachers have their obvious strengths on pronunciation, grammar, new words and expressions etc. According to the "marine English database" established by Foreign Language College of Dalian Maritime University (DMU), only 3% of most frequently used marine English words are not included in the vocabulary of CET-4, showing that majority of marine English words is the maritime professional implication or abbreviation of Basic English words [Xiaoling, Z, 2001]. The recent revision of the competency examination outline focuses more on inspecting students' maritime professional knowledge in English. Thus the author suggests that the incorporation of maritime professional teachers and Basic English teachers as a team be taken into

consideration as to the allocation of marine English teachers, picking those with comparatively higher English ability among maritime professional teachers and enhancing their English, choosing those with certain navigational knowledge among basic English teachers and training. By doing so, it facilitates the inter-complement and learning from each other in teaching. Meanwhile, Basic English teachers should retain enough time to learn or update their navigational knowledge by means of undertaking as less Basic English teaching task as possible.

4.2 Specifically setting the teaching content

At present, the institutes engaging navigational specialization education in China generally are three-year colleges or four-year universities, which normally provide 1-2 years marine English learning. According to Chinese Rules on Seamen's Competency Examination, Evaluation and Certification, regardless of undergraduate or collage education, students would not get the competency certificate of third officer or fourth engineer until the date of 12 months sailing practice after passing the competency examination, change for competency certificate of second officer or third engineer until 12 months duration as third officer or fourth engineer, and then take part in competency examination of chief officer or second engineer after serving on board for more than 12 months as second officer or third engineer. Normally at least 36 months (usually longer than this period in practice) is needed for a graduate to become a management level seafarer. Therefore, marine English instruction should first meet the competency requirements to crews at operational level. Against crews' position responsibility, principle of "listening and speaking first, following by reading, and supplement of writing" should be established. At the mean time when Manila Amendments' requirements to operational level crews are satisfied, in lessons for listening and speaking, teaching content is set by mainly referencing of SMCP and all kinds of working situation of operational level; in lessons of reading, part of the content of management level might be added. In the case of inadequate time for marine English learning, writing lessons might not be arranged for collage students or put it in selective course.

4.3 Improving teaching methods

What marine English instruction faces is the shipping industry which is characterized with its extremely strong practice, and university students without any practice experience, thus there must be certain innovation of teaching method. Situational teaching, on-site teaching and simulation teaching are very effective teaching methods. For example, arrange different working scenarios like cargo handling and PSC inspection and let students perform various roles; apply method of on-site teaching and picture display method in the course of ship's structure and equipments; utilize simulator to simulate the scene of avoidance coordination in sailing and VTS reporting. In order to improve teaching effectiveness, the traditional teaching method should be broken, replaced by flexible and

different teaching methods. This requires deep research by undertaking teacher of marine English instruction, as well needs the strong support of the institutions.

4.4 Reforming the assessment mode

The assessment mode of present marine English instruction is basically the paper exam (summative exam) in the end of the course, which has been weakening by competency certificate examination. This assessment mode is obviously not appropriate especially for lessons of listening or speaking, which could hardly reflect the true ability of students. The formative assessment is a relatively scientific mode of assessment which focuses on supervising and assessing the learning process of students. The assessment of marine English instruction may be suggested being divided into three categories: assessment at ordinary time, periodic assessment and final exam. The weight of each category could be 20%, 30% and 50% respectively. In the end, take about three assessments in synthetic consideration to get the final achievement of the subject. This mode of assessment can monitor the whole process of students' study and can more objectively reflect students' extent of endeavour and real level in marine English.

4.5 Creating good English learning atmosphere

The accumulation of maritime knowledge does not rely only on the textbook, which is as well the case on marine English learning. Maritime universities or colleges need to create good English learning atmosphere in campus or routine life. For example, maritime teachers introduce marine terminologies or expressions in English when delivering professional lessons; each level of universities or colleges

demonstrates all kinds of navigational issues with English etc. Rich variety of activities can form good language environment to push students to actively speak English, thinking by English way.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Lower English ability is all the time one of main obstacles restraining Chinese crews walking to the international market. With the enforcement of Manila Amendments, the requirement of seamen's English ability the shipping market requests is further upgraded. There exist some weaknesses or problems to Chinese marine English instruction which need to be innovated. In order to improve marine English teaching level, cultivate more qualified, good seafarers satisfying shipping market's demand, Chinese maritime universities or colleges should take active, innovative actions including but not limited to the following: optimizing the allocation of marine English instructor, setting teaching content specifically, improving teaching methods, reforming the assessment mode, creating good English learning atmosphere.

6. REFERENCES

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