

TEACHING MARITIME ENGLISH-COMPULSORY COURSES VS ELECTIVE COURSES

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Abstract: *The title is somehow deceptive since the aim of this paper is to demonstrate that elective courses in Maritime English are as important as the compulsory ones. First, we will present the status of the English language within the Naval Academy curricula with special reference to the navigation specialty. Then, the contents of the two types of courses, designed in compliance with the graduate profile and the Romanian Naval Authority requirements, will be presented. Finally, conclusions will be drawn in the sense that both types of courses are necessary for a fully rounded professional education of our students.*

Key words: *Maritime English, compulsory courses, elective courses, SMCP phrases, Maritime Focus.*

1. THE STATUS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE WITHIN THE NAVAL ACADEMY CURRICULA

The first turning point in the status of the English language within the Naval Academy occurred in 2005 when university studies in Romania were reorganised in accordance with Bologna declaration [1]. This declaration, signed by 46 countries, aims to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The objectives of the Bologna declaration include:

-adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, also through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system;

-adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle shall require successful completion of the first cycle of studies, lasting a minimum 3 years. The degree awarded after the first cycle of studies shall be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as in many European countries;

-establishment of a system of credits-such as ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility;

-promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies;

-promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research;

The implementation of the Bologna declaration requirements resulted, firstly, in reducing the period of university studies from 5 years to 4 years and, secondly, in changing the status of the English language from a compulsory discipline during the 5 years of study, to a compulsory one during the first two years and then an elective one during the following two years of study. This change was the consequence of the reduced percentage (8%) of complementary, yet compulsory disciplines, in the economy of the curricula.

The second turning point in the status of the English language within the Naval Academy occurred in 2009, when the Academy management signed a protocol with the Romanian Naval Authority, which issues seafarer certificates. As far as the English language is concerned, the Authority requires proof of 370 hours of Maritime English so that the graduates could be accepted to sit for the 3rd Officer certificate examination. The Authority also imposed requirements on the content of the Maritime English syllabus which should comply with the STCW 95[2] (Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping) competence requirements A-II/1 and the IMO

Model Course 3.17 [3] guidelines for teaching Maritime English.

Under these circumstances, an increase in the number of English language hours had to be considered. The solution was (we are referring now to Navigation specialty only): two hours of compulsory English and two hours of elective English a week for the first two years of study, followed by 70 hours and 84 hours elective courses the following two years. The total number of hours (compulsory plus elective) is in compliance with the authorities' requirements. The only problem is that elective courses have to be paid and there lies the rub. We have to persuade the students to opt for the elective courses. How? By making them aware of the usefulness of the contents of the two types of courses for their future career.

2. COMPULSORY ENGLISH AND MARITIME ENGLISH COURSE CONTENTS

First of all, we should point out that the English taught at the Naval Academy is ESP (English for Special Purposes) English. The compulsory English course, which covers the first two years, was designed mainly for naval engineers who would not necessarily go out at sea but would work as port authority officers or naval architecture engineers. The elective course, called Maritime English, is General English in maritime context with a Maritime focus included. The combination of the types of courses is addressed to students who are adamant to navigate, therefore to get the 3rd Officer Certificate.

The compulsory English course, covering the first two years of study, focuses mainly on vocabulary (naval terminology), grammar and reading skills. The topics included in the compulsory English course are: **Ship Structure, Ship's Dimensions, Directions: terms related to position on board ship, The Bridge, Ground Tackle (anchoring equipment and deck fittings), Signal Lights, Flags and Pennants (the International code of signals); Different Types of Rope, Life Saving Appliances** (the first year of study), **Anchoring, Mooring, Towing, Pilot on Board, Boarding the ship (Medical Inspection, Customs Inspection), Reception of Cargo, Delivery of Cargo, Buying Provisions and the main COLREGS** (Collision Prevention Regulations) **rules plus SMCP (Standard Marine Communication Phrases)** [4] (the second year of study).

The structure of units in the first year compulsory course is as follows: text accompanied by diagrams, vocabulary and vocabulary practice, grammar (theory and practice) and a self-test which evaluates the knowledge acquired by the students throughout the unit.

The structure of the units in the second year compulsory course is different from the first year course in the sense that more emphasis is placed on reading comprehension (i.e. excerpts from the Pilot Book relating to port approaches description, anchorage characteristics, towing, piloting, medical inspection and customs examination requirements in different ports, etc.), as well as on vocabulary

in context, that is, simulated dialogues based on the above mentioned topics.

The Maritime English course, based on the IMO Model Course 3.17 designed to comply with the STCW 98 requirements, is an integrated skills course, each unit containing grammar, vocabulary, phonology and communication skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The course covers all the four years of elective English including the following 15 units: **English at Sea, At the Crewing Office, In Transit, A Safety Culture, Weather Report, Describing a Process, Changes and Trends, Reporting Back, Aptitude and Appraisal, Who’s Calling, What’s Been Happening?, It Used to be Different, Marine Protection, What Would you do if...and Mysteries of the Sea.** Each unit also contains a Maritime Focus, which *anticipates*, *recycles* or *complements* some of the compulsory English topics. In the IMO Model Course 3.17, the units are defined in terms of performances. For instance, the required performance for Unit 2 (the first year of study) is:[the learner is able to]: discuss and confirm travel arrangements for joining ship; make and confirm accommodation reservations; describe stages in preparing for sea and for arrival in port, which *complements* the topic in Unit 2 compulsory course referring to Ship’s Dimensions only. On the other hand, The Maritime Focus included in the same unit, *anticipates* topics that will be studied in the second year compulsory course. The required performance for the elective course unit 2 Maritime focus is:[the learner is able to]: complete a pilot card with information about the ship’s

particulars; complete a Ship to Shore master/pilot Exchange form and Shore to Ship Pilot/master exchange form; use SMCP (Standard Marine Communication Phrases) for simulated external communications to request a pilot; use SMCP for simulated onboard communication between pilot and bridge team for a range of situations; describe procedures for berthing and unberthing; name different types of rope and describe their properties and uses; identify parts of anchoring equipment correctly from diagrams; identify mooring winches and lines correctly from diagrams. .

Another example to prove the point that the Maritime English course *complements* the compulsory English one is Unit 3 (the first year of study).The required performance for this unit is: [the learner is able to]: describe procedures at international airports; demonstrate understanding of the cultural norms of different nationalities; describe incidents that occur on shore and on board; write reports of incidents on board. The Maritime Focus requirements for this unit are:[the learner is able to]: summarise the details of an incident verbally after reading a completed incident report form in detail; use SMCP for simulated external communications regarding helicopter rescue. We will provide an example from unit 3 of the elective English course referring to procedures at international airports compared with unit 3 of the compulsory English course which refers to Directions on board ship only.

1a. Match one word from box A with one word from box B. Make new words connected with air travel.

| A | B |
|------------|----------|
| connecting | control |
| excess | seat |
| cabin | claim |
| departure | crew |
| passport | flight |
| baggage | desk |
| duty-free | shop |
| metal | pass |
| departure | baggage |
| boarding | lounge |
| check-in | board |
| aisle | detector |

1b. Checking in Read the text. Marco, a 2nd Officer from Italy, is on his way to Halifax to join his ship. Complete the details of his journey using your answers from exercise 1a.

Marco was booked on the 1230 flight from Amsterdam to Halifax. He entered the airport and walked straight to the...1.....

‘A window seat or an.....2..., sir?’

‘A window seat, please.’ Marco put his luggage on the scales.

‘I’m afraid you’ll have to pay.....3.....on that, sir. You’re over 15 kilos over the limit.’

After checking in, Marco made his way to....4...where his documents were checked. Security was tight and everyone had to walk through a...5...before proceeding to the...6....

Here, he settled himself into the seat and periodically glanced at the....7....to see when he should board the plane or if the flight was delayed. Before his flight was called, he bought a few items at the.....8.... When his flight was eventually called, he went to the gate where his9....was checked. He proceeded along the corridor, boarded the plane and one of the.....10...directed him to his seat. The first leg of Marco’s journey took him to New York, where he waited in the transit lounge for his....11...Four hours later, he touched down in Halifax and picked up his suitcases from the...12.... Having nothing to declare, he cleared customs quickly and waited for the agent at the meeting point.

DIRECTIONS

TERMS RELATING TO POSITION ON BOARD SHIP

1. One way in which the language of the sea and the language used on land are different is in the terminology of directions. When a sailor gets on a ship he *goes aboard*. He doesn’t go to the back of the ship, he goes *aft*. If he wants to walk toward the bow of the ship, he goes *forward*. If he doesn’t find what he wants, he checks *fore* and *aft*, which means from the bow to the stern. If that doesn’t help, he looks *abaft* which means further to the rear, or *astern* (behind the stern). He never watches the sea from the right side of the ship, he watches from the *starboard*. The left side is always called the *port* side. If he sees something directly off either side of the ship, it’s located *abeam*. An object or area which lies across the ship from the starboard to the port side is said to be *athwartships*. Anything in the centre of the ship is located *amidships*. A sailor looking to either side of the ship from amidships is facing *outboard*. Somebody watching him from either side has to face *inboard*. Something over him from any part of the ship is *above*. If it’s very high, such as on a mast, it’s *aloft*. If it’s under him, it’s *below*. Something away from the wind is *lee*. If it’s in a lee direction, it’s *leeward*. If it moves in a lee direction, it goes *leeway*. If it’s near the ship, it’s *close aboard*.

2. VOCABULARY

Words and phrases

Aft = în spate, spre pupa

Forward = în față, spre prova
 Fore and aft = de-a lungul
 Aft = la pupa, aproape de pupa; înapoia, spre/către/înspre pupa
 Astern = înapoi, în spate, la/în pupa; mers înapoi; cu mers/marș înapoi
 Starboard side = tribord
 Port side = babord
 Abeam = la travers, de la travers
 Athwartships = transversal/travers pe nava; la traversul navei
 Amidships = la centrul/mijlocul navei; in axul navei; la cuplul maestru; pozitie zero a cirmei

Outboard = peste bord, in exteriorul navei
 Inboard = interior, in interiorul navei
 Above = deasupra; in amonte
 Aloft = în gabie, în arboradă, sus pe verga
 Below = jos, sub
 Lee = bord de sub vînt, zona de calm (în bordul de sub vînt al navei) ; sub vînt
 Leeward = bord de sub vînt; a veni sub vînt (despre nava);sub vînt, la adapost de vînt
 Close aboard = foarte aproape, la mică distanță (de navă)

2.1. Look at the diagram below and identify the following directions:

(forward, aft, abaft, astern, on the port side, on the starboard side, abeam, athwartships, midships)

e.g. a is forward

i

a

b

c

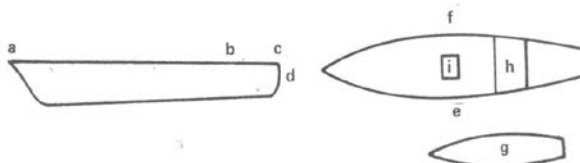
d

f

g

h

e



The point we wanted to make was that the compulsory English course is more technical, being meant for naval engineers mainly, whereas the combination of the two courses (compulsory and elective) is meant for the students who want to go at sea and get the third officer certificate. By covering the both types of courses, our students will have an insight into the engineering aspect of the shipping industry as well as into the life in a maritime context which involves intercultural human relationships within mixed nationality crew.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have tried to demonstrate how important it is for our students, who want to go at sea, to attend both types of courses. It is important for them because the contents provides, on the one hand, complementary information, and on the other hand, similar information, but at different stages of the course, thus allowing for recycling and consolidation of the knowledge acquired in both types of courses.

4. REFERENCES

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