

ROLE PLAYS IN MARITIME CONTEXTS

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Abstract: Role plays are an ideal way of developing fluency due to the fact that they encompass an extremely varied collection of activities, ranging from controlled guided conversations to improvised performances; in other words, from simple, structural dialogues to complex scenarios. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the rationale for using role plays during ME (Maritime English) classes, and to bring together this range of activities for classroom use with a view to developing students' speaking skill.

Keywords: role play, Maritime English, speaking skill

INTRODUCTION

What is role play? As the two words suggest, when assuming a role, students *play* a part in a specific situation which – in our case – is a maritime-related one.

Why using role plays? First of all, because students create their own reality and thus experiment with their knowledge of the world and develop their ability to interact. Moreover, since none of the usual risks entailed by communication and behavior in the real world exist, this kind of activity is enjoyable, attractive, and also boosts self-confidence. Secondly, role play is a relatively simple and brief technique to organize, not to mention its flexibility since students' variation, initiative and imagination are challenged here.

How to use role plays? When starting to use role play, a few main problem areas might arise. They usually lie with common misconceptions about the nature of role play: it will create chaos in the classroom, if it's fun students will not learn anything, they will refuse to impersonate somebody else, or they will not be able to act because they are too shy.

Therefore, there must be some class management. For instance, in order to avoid too much noise and chaos, a better way to start is to do pair work rather than group work. Also, keep the activity short and make sure that there are enough students to cover the role play situation.

Another important aspect is to check students' understanding of the situation on their role cards before starting the activity. Role plays should not contain difficult or too emotionally loaded situations either at first as it will result in students breaking into their native language (especially in monolingual classes); however, this might be tolerated if it keeps the role play going. There should always be a follow-up activity just for the pairs/groups that finish their role play before the others.

Finally, a time limit should be set and efforts made to stick to it.

How to use role cards? The most frequently heard complaint regarding role cards is that they are lifeless since students are somewhat glued to them. This is yet another misconception that can be easily discarded by pointing out the fact that it has to be made plain to the students that they should have mastered the information on the card before they begin the activity. Therefore, students should either return their role cards to the teacher or turn it over just to refer to it when completely stuck. At this point they are completely free to use their imagination and be more spontaneous.

To facilitate this, role cards should be concise and contain only essential points; if the information is too rich, the students will surely find it difficult to grasp it rapidly.

Assigning role cards is of equal importance. It is important to avoid distributing a key role to a weak student or else the activity will fall flat on its face. Sometimes it is better to let

students choose the role they feel inspired by or they think it might suit them.

How to correct mistakes? There are many ways to go about it, but there is one thing that has to be taken into consideration: never while role play is in progress. After the role play, mistakes can be corrected immediately by eliciting the correct forms from the students, by writing them on the whiteboard, or by incorporating some remedial work into a later lesson.

How to finish off role play?

Debriefing is sometimes as important as the activity itself. It revolves around such questions as: 1. Who participated? 2. Who did not participate? 3. Why did they not participate? 4. Who was very good? 5. Who could have done better?

However, evaluation should take first place rather than criticism, and point out what went well and only then get on to what went badly. Positive thinking about the experience should be encouraged and maintained. Although there are different types of role, only the ones that correspond to a real need in our students' lives are made reference to. In this category such roles as applying for a job, dealing with responsibilities on board ships or ashore were included. There is a practical reason to it: the relevance of the situation will highly motivate students, so the role play should match to their essential preoccupations.

The role plays devised by the author of this paper are as follows:

1. **Famous sailors**
2. **Who am I?**
3. **Reading the part** (newspaper article on piracy, controversial situation)
4. **Listening in role**
5. **Guided role plays**
6. **The panel discussion: are weapons a must on board merchant ships?**
7. **Flashbacks**
8. **The guided tour**
9. **Ships of the future**
10. **The job interview**

The format that the role plays follow includes: (1) a *brief description* that gives a general idea of the activity itself, (2) the *level* the activity is suitable for, (3) an indication of the *time* the activity requires, (4) its *aim*, the type of *language* that the students will need during the role play, (5) *type* of activity (pair or group work, group size), (6) *preparation* (any material that should be previously prepared), (7) *warm-up* (drawing students' attention and getting them interested in the topic), (8) *procedure* (how to carry out the activity), (9) *follow-up* (how to finish off the activity), (10) *remarks* (difficulties or other points of general interest that may occasionally occur are pointed out under this heading).

1. Famous sailors

Description: This is a guessing game in which students adopt the role of famous sailors.

Level: elementary and above

Time: 20 minutes

Aim: familiarize students with the idea of role play

Language: interrogative structures, past tense vs. present perfect

Type of activity: plenary

Preparation: list of famous sailors and their short biographies (James Cook, Christopher Columbus, Arthur Phillip etc)

Warm-up: Teacher (T) demonstrates the game by choosing a famous sailor and encouraging students to ask questions in order to find out who it is about.

Procedure: The students (Ss) each choose a famous sailor, but keep their choice to themselves, and wait for questions from others to which they will be able to answer in the first person. Each and every student takes it in turns, comes upfront and gives rather evasive and ambiguous answers, trying not to give the game away immediately. When the other students think they have an idea about the identity of the famous sailor, they should write it on a piece of paper and hand it to the teacher. This prevents the game from breaking down too soon. When a sufficient number of guesses have been collected, T should stop the game and announce the first student who made the right guess.

Follow-up: The discussion about the game may include questions like: *What made it easy to guess the character?, What made it difficult?, or What else could have been added?, How would you go about if you were...?*

Remarks: This activity surely gives an opportunity for practicing interrogative structures for most of the class.

2. Who am I?

Description: This is another guessing game in which Ss ask questions to find out the ranks in the deck department.

Level: elementary and above

Time: 20 minutes

Aim: develop Ss' ability to respond spontaneously in conversations

Language: fluency

Type of activity: whole class

Preparation: slips of paper with ranks and duties performed by deck department personnel for distribution around the class

Warm-up: no specific warm-up phase since direct and immediate response is elicited

Procedure: Ss stand in a circle, one of them is nominated to sit in the middle, and the previously prepared slips of paper are distributed to everyone but the student in the middle of the circle. In turn Ss should approach the person in the middle and address one question. The only accepted answers are “yes” or “no”. The winner is obviously the person who got the rank right.

Follow-up: same as the above

Remarks: This activity is intended to help Ss familiarize with responsibilities according to their rank on board ships, and the other way around.

3. Reading the part (newspaper article on piracy, controversial situation)

Description: Ss select relevant information from articles according to an adopted role.

Level: elementary and above

Time: 30 minutes

Aim: scanning, skimming assuming role plays

Language: reading skills

Type of activity: in pairs, then share their ideas with the rest of the class.

Preparation: Ss will be directed to the following website address: <http://blog.usni.org/2009/07/17/armed-merchant-ship-crews-will-not-escalate-the-pirate-problem/> . If internet connection is not available, T should provide Ss with a copy of the article in paper format.

Warm-up: T should ask Ss if they read newspaper, or listen to the news. If yes tell when they do that and whom they discuss it with.

Procedure: T will tell Ss that they came across an article about the issue of carrying guns on board merchant ships to prevent sea piracy.

Ss are asked to identify with one of the following roles:

- crew member(s) on board a merchant ship
- crew member on board a warship
- master of a ship
- ship owner(s)
- pirate(s)
- IMO representative(s)

As Ss read the article in their assumed roles, they should make notes on the information that is relevant to their character; also they should jot down their thoughts, ideas, and feelings occurring to them while reading.

Follow-up: retelling (in writing) the situation from their perspective

Remarks: Almost any newspaper article may be used in this way provided the issues are maritime related.

4. Listening in role

Description: Ss select relevant information from a recording according to an adopted role.

Level: intermediate and above

Time: 20 minutes

Aim: familiarize Ss with the idea of playing roles in their daily lives

Language: listening skills, interrogative, reporting an event

Type of activity: pairs, or groups of three

Preparation: T should record or play the recording at this site: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzbFxmE6lYw>

Warm-up: T asks SS whether they are aware of unfortunate incidents at sea.

Procedure: T explains the situation s/he has chosen, and then divides Ss in pairs or groups as needed. SS will select a role from a list that was previously written up on the whiteboard or on a card (captain, crew member, safety officer, rescue team member, passenger, etc). Ss will listen to the recorded report and put down the most important pieces of information that might be useful to re-create the incident according to their assumed role. T will bring the groups/pairs together and set up a discussion.

5. Guided role plays

Description: Ss improvise conversations by following a flow-chart.

Level: elementary to intermediate

Time: 10-15 minutes

Aim: helps Ss keep a conversation going

Language: varied, according to the chosen situation

Type of activity: pairs

Preparation: T designs flow-charts (as in the examples below)

Procedure: T divides the class into pairs, then gives out the flow-charts, and assigns Student A and Student B roles.

Anchoring

Student A – pilot

1. Greet the captain and introduce yourself to him.
3. Tell the captain that you will shortly be at the anchorage, and that it is time to notify the engine room and get the anchors ready.
5. Tell the captain we are going to use the starboard anchor.
7. Tell the captain that you think 5 shackles will do.
9. Tell the captain that it is good, ask him if he sees the red tower in the distance, and then tell him that you must steer for it to the lighthouse that opens to southward.
11. Tell the captain that you have to alter the course 40 degrees to starboard and steer for the lighthouse until you are a mile off-shore.

Student B – captain

2. Greet the pilot and welcome him on board your ship.
4. Ask the pilot which anchor to use.
6. Ask the pilot how much chain you will need.
8. Tell the pilot that you already sent a deck-hand to take soundings.
10. Ask the pilot what will happen next.
12. Tell the pilot that you understand and want him to proceed carefully.

Follow-up: Ss will be asked to write down the dialog, and then act it out.

6. The panel discussion: are weapons a must on board merchant ships?

Description: Ss read articles expressing different points of view and then express their owns in a panel discussion.

Level: intermediate and above

Time: 30 minutes

Aim: to train students in expressing a coherent point of view and provide a framework for an improvised discussion.

Language: expressing opinions, agreeing, disagreeing

Type of activity: groups of 3 -5 students

Preparation: Ss are asked to read the article at this website address <http://blog.usni.org/2009/07/17/armed-merchant-ship-crews-will-not-escalate-the-pirate-problem/>. If internet connection is not available in the classroom, then T should have the article printed out.

Warm-up: T will show the class a photo of crew members being held prisoners on their ship by modern pirates for the purpose of eliciting a “gut reaction” to the topic.

Procedure: T will group Ss, ask them to read through the article, and put down bits of information that will help them express their opinions. T should also set a time limit for both the reading and the speaking activities. Ss express their points of view in turns, and the discussion will grow naturally.

Follow-up: T can ask Ss to express their point of view in writing (as homework assignment).

7. Flashbacks

Description: Ss improve contrasted scenes from the present and the past of life onboard ships.

Level: intermediate and advanced

Time: 20 minutes

Aim: describing, comparing and contrasting talking about present/past

Language: talking about present/past, comparison of adjectives

Type of activity: pairs (Student A and Student B)

Preparation: T will provide Ss with photographs (one set for Students A, another set for Students B) of old sailing ships and new, modern ones, of loading/unloading equipment in the 19th century and present day etc.

Procedure: Ss should describe their photo and then point out the differences between what seafarers did then and do now, what things at sea used to be and is nowadays.

Follow-up: T may ask Ss to list the things that were better in the past, and the things that are better now.

Remarks: This activity requires a considerable amount of specialized vocabulary.

8. The guided tour

Description: Ss take a new crewmember on a guided tour on board their ship.

Level: intermediate and above

Time: 20 minutes

Aim: describing places

Language: this is.../this is where...

Type of activity: pairs

Preparation: pictures of different locations on board the ship (bridge, mess room, accommodation, engine room etc)

Warm-up: T draws a typical ship on the whiteboard and elicits vocabulary from the class to label it.

Procedure: T divides the class into pairs, and explains the situation to the class. Student A is a new member of the crew and Student B has been delegated to show Student A around. They go on an imaginary tour of the ship, with Student B commenting on the places they visit, and Student A asking questions. When Ss have finished, T will ask them to swap roles, and go on a tour of the other person's ship.

Follow-up: Ss can be asked to make a written presentation (homework assignment).

Remarks: There could be variations to this activity such as:

1. Ss will describe their job responsibilities to somebody who is new onboard the ship.

2. Ss will do the same guided tour as in the activity described above, but this time the emphasis is on people working on board. The newcomer is introduced to each member of the crew and knows how things work on board that particular ship.

9. Ships of the future

Description: Ss present the newest generation ships, and negotiate the purchase of one ship.

Level: intermediate to advanced

Time: 30 minutes

Aim: to encourage group discussions, formal presentations

Language: persuading, dissuading, agreeing, disagreeing

Type of activity: in groups

Preparation: T should record (or make sure there is internet connection available) short video clips containing presentations of several ships:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUM2vk1bRq4> – this video clip contains a presentation of the next generation of ships of the Royal Navy

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RK5WOXZknk0&feature=vwrel> – this video clip contains the presentation of a futuristic French warship

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxFs5LpDsQU> – this video clip contains the presentation of the Triple-E ship class

Warm-up: T begins by asking Ss about the kinds of ships they are familiar with and whether they are aware of the newest concepts modern ships operate on nowadays.

Procedure: Ss are divided into groups, and T tells them that they advisors who must decide what type of ship is suitable for purchasing in order to meet their Navy needs. Also they should be told that they are on a tight budget which allows them to purchase only one ship. Ss will watch the above-mentioned video clips, and present their choice to the rest of the class.

Follow-up: At the end of this activity, the class should decide which group presented the best arguments, and therefore the ship of their choice is going to be purchased.

10. The job interview

Description: Ss write possible CVs to apply for a job in the shipping industry and present to another group to role-play a personnel meeting where one of the candidates will be chosen.

Level: intermediate and above

Time: 30 minutes

Aim: to involve Ss in writing role-play material for each other

Language: agreeing, disagreeing, suggesting, expressing opinions

Procedure: T will divide the class into groups, give one of the job ads below:

Officer

A career at sea with the A.P. Moller - Maersk Group provides skilled and motivated individuals with a challenging profession in a dynamic and challenging environment.

As Officer in A.P.Moller-Maersk you will enter a motivating environment for professional development and personal growth. Further a job as officer provides good career opportunities, introduction to a strong network across the group and excellent training and leadership skills. You will, as officer, be introduced to our core values, hereunder constant care (uprightness, humbleness, our name, and our employees).

Cadet

The A.P. Moller - Maersk Cadet Education is the platform to train, groom and develop cadets as future Maritime Officers by providing second to none education opportunities, imbuing our core values, culture and leadership skills and offering a motivating atmosphere for professional development and personal growth.

We train and educate future officers with an aim at providing the candidates with the A.P.Moller - Maersk values associated with working as a Maritime Officer. The education system provides the candidates with a theoretical as well as a practical insight into many different areas of vessel operations, hereunder maritime technology, navigation, safety, cargo operations, leadership and management.

A career at sea with the A.P. Moller - Maersk Group provides young and motivated individuals with a challenging profession within a world of opportunities in an internationally and challenging environment.

T will ask SS to spend some time discussing the assigned ad. Half of each group is asked to write CVs, while the other half of the group decides what questions they would ask in an interview according to the qualities/qualifications in the job profile sheets. When time is up, the groups will swap their CVs and job profile sheets, and will try to familiarize with their roles. Then, the interviewers will role-play an interview with each of the candidates in turn.

Follow-up: The interviewers will decide which of the candidates gets the job and why, and they will report their decision to the class.

Type of activity: small groups of four to six students

Preparation: T will find these two job advertisements at the following address:

<http://www.maersk.com/CAREER/Pages/MaritimeApplications.aspx>

Warm-up: T should prepare Ss for writing a CV by eliciting the rubrics that are expected to be filled in. T will ask the class to tell what to write on it, what to include, and what to leave out. This mock CV will be written on the whiteboard for future reference.

CONCLUSIONS

Role play should not be an isolated activity, but integrated within the lesson which is taught. Whether it is the climax of it or at the end of the lesson it will be entirely teacher's choice. Also, it will be a matter of choice whether the linguistic items are introduced before the role play starts, or fed in later on as remedial work. Nevertheless, a teacher's role during the role play should be that of both organizer and observer whereas students will explore language and practice it as if they were out there, in the real world.

This is why role play is an essential part of any language course, as well as English courses.

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