THE ROLE OF PRACTICE AND SELF-TESTS IN THE ECONOMY OF MARITIME ENGLISH COURSES

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Abstract: First, there will be a discussion on the need for Maritime English (ME) in the shipping industry, decided by the international maritime decision-making bodies, as a result of globalisation leading to the proliferation of multinational crews on board ships claiming a commonly accepted language for on board and external communications. Then, the need for MET (Maritime Education and Training) Institutions to design meaningful courses to meet the STCW'95/10 and IMO 3.17 Course Module requirements will be emphasised. A literature review on testing will be overviewed followed by the presentation of some samples of practice and self-tests included in deck cadets' courses with the purpose of consolidating their ESP (English for Special Purposes) knowledge. The conclusions will include some of the students' opinions on the above mentioned tests as an efficient means of preparing for the end of term final test.
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Introduction

Maritime English is a subsystem of the English language, a specific language area reflecting a specific human activity, i.e. the shipping industry. Why do we need a common language at sea? Why all seafarers ranging from ratings to officers and shore-based personnel need to be proficient in Maritime English? The answer resides in the findings of the researches, not few in number, carried out by international specialised agencies such as the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) with its headquarters in Lisbon, Portugal, the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) in the UK and other important national agencies in the United Stated and Canada. The common conclusion, after thoroughly analysing the shipping accidents, was that the main cause or a contributory factor to 20% (De la Campa,2003) or even 30-40% (Trenkner, 2000) of maritime incidents or accidents was defective communication on board ship, especially in emergency situations when panic sets in, in ship-to-ship or ship-to-shore exchanges. A poor knowledge of Maritime English and problems of communication may cause misunderstandings leading to dangers to the vessel, the crew and the environment.

Therefore, in the light of the above mentioned research results, organisations such as the International Maritime Organisation IMO), the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) or the International Association of Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) have contributed to promote and sustain the English language as the common international language at sea. The standardised version, called *Standard Marine Communication Phrases* (SMCP) was adopted on 29 November 2001 by the IMO`s General Assembly. Since then, the use of the SMCP has become mandatory for ship-to-ship or ship-to-shore safety communications as well as for communications on board between the pilot and bridge watch-keeping personnel. The STCW (Standards of Training Certification and Watch-keeping)98/10 Convention stated a set of requirements for the seafarer`s ability to use Maritime English in routine and emergency situations. A proficient use of Maritime English is particularly important in the case of multicultural crews. It has been estimated the almost 90% of crews having English as their working language are not native speakers of English (Johnson, 1999; Pritchard, 2003a). Other statistics show that more than nine out of ten shipping industry professionals are non-native speakers of English (Trenkner, 2000) and that over 60% of the world`s fleet are manned and operate with mixed crews (Kahveci & Sampson, 2001). Since all international and local shipping industry authorities have reached the conclusion that the role of Maritime English is very important in the

maritime business development, the key requirement for MET institutions is to see to the implementation of meaningful Maritime English programmes which should help graduates to successfully solve all the problems that might occur on board ship.

Maritime English and MET institutions

In my opinion, the great problem the MET institutions are confronted with nowadays is the lack of consensus as to the curricula and the syllabi content as well as to the number of ME hours throughout the four years of study or the credits this discipline is allocated. We have been provided with standardised language area to be taught but there is no standardisation as to the how, when and for how long the ME topics should be taught.

The EU-funded SeaTALK, project, an EU Lifelong Learning programme, will probably give the answer to the questions most Maritime Teachers frequently ask. The Project aims to develop Maritime English training modules to be incorporated into an ECVET (European Credit transfer system for Vocational Educational Training)-based model cross-referenced with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).Its final objective is to use the model to facilitate the mutual recognition and transparency of learning outcomes and competences in Maritime English throughout Europe.

The SeaTALK Project target groups are: seafarers, students, vocational education and training providers offering Maritime Training programmes, Maritime Universities, Shipping companies providing cooperative training, labour market authorities who are promoting employment possibilities on the sector and rely heavily on the European work force mobility and recognition, MVET (Maritime Vocational and Training) associations and their members such as IMEC (International Maritime English Conference), IMLA (International Maritime Lecturers Association) and IAMU (International Association of Maritime Universities) and decision makers on international, European, national, regional and local levels who are planning future policies for maritime sector and are significantly influencing the Maritime industry development.

The early stage of the project included the design and administration of a survey to collect information about the current state of ME practices across Europe (maritime institutions in 17 countries have contributed to the survey). The results obtained from the survey helped the SeaTALK team to create ME competence grids for each seafaring rank and profession, and to produce acceptable learning outcomes for Maritime English with a view to developing a common credit system.

I am very confident in the success of this Project, to which I am proud to have contributed with teaching materials for deck officers. I particularly like the model framework which includes: the maritime authorities` requirements -**Occupational standard,** the seafarer or learner competences- **Language Learning Outcome** and the seafarer or learner language skills-**language Learning Criteria.**

Here is an example of the three framework components:

Occupational standard (STCW Table A-II/1)1. Use effectively all relevant documents related to work and international requirements (SOLAS, MARPOL, STCW as amended, ILO conventions; ISM, ISPS codes).
Language Learning Outcome
The learner should be able to:
1.A Demonstrate knowledge of the content, application and purpose of nautical publications and extract relevant information.
Language Learning Criteria
1.A.1 Can read, understand and work with conventional written documentation found on board.
1.A.2 Comprehend and use information from Sailing Directions, Guide to port entry, COLREGs, List of lights and List of radio signals, NAVTEX information, Notices to Mariners, shipping correspondence
1.A.3 Comprehend and use adequately technical manuals, drawings, charts and tables (e.g. Lists of lights and Fog signals, Tide tables) and infer meaning from graphical, symbolic and numerical information herein included.

The proposed framework is a very important working tool for ME teachers when designing their teaching/learning materials. Also, the online platform for ME materials is a very good idea since all those interested in the domain can access it and see what their peers have posted. In this way ME teachers can exchange materials and get ideas for their own in-house designed ones.

2. The Role of Practice and Self-Tests within a ME course unit

The survey carried out by the SeaTALK team revealed among other things the fact that most MET institutions use in-house designed materials. We can find the same situation within the Naval Academy, namely, the ME teachers design their own teaching/learning materials.

I am going to refer to the 1st year deck students course in order to illustrate the importance of progress and final achievement tests included in the learning units of the course.

The Maritime English course for the 1st year deck students was designed in compliance with the maritime authorities` regulatory documents and in accordance with some of the specialist disciplines topics studied in the 1st year, i.e. fundamentals of seamanship and fundamentals of navigation. As a result, the course is based mostly on *terminology* related to: ship structure, e.g. hull, keel, bulkheads, decks, watertight compartments, etc.; directions, e.g. forward, aft, athwartships, fore and aft, abeam, aloft, etc.; naval equipment, e.g. windlass, capstans, winches, deck fittings, etc. The philosophy behind conceiving and designing this course was that first and foremost the first year students must be familiarised, both in Romanian and in English, with their future "work place", that is the ship. The SMCP (Standard Marine Communication Phrases) will be taught in the second and third year when the students will be ready to heave up anchor and set sail to a certain destination where they will have to anchor in the roadstead, then take a pilot to enter the port, then give the VTS (Vessel Traffic Service) the required information, next heave the ship into her berth, afterwards, perform loading /unloading operations and finally leave for the next port of call. The printed course has also an on-line version which is on current use. The two examples are extracted from the printed version of the course, although references will be made to the on-line version as well.

The 1st year course comprises eight units: Ship Structure, Ship's Dimensions, Directions and Positions on board ship, Propulsion, Steering and the Bridge, Naval Equipment (I): Ground Tackle, Naval Equipment (II) Lights, Flags and Bells, Seamanship-Different types of Ropes and Manning.

Each unit has the following structure: a short text, usually containing diagrams, vocabulary (English-Romanian), Vocabulary Practice-different types of exercises which are meant to consolidate the students` knowledge about the topic studied in the unit. Then, there is the grammar theory and practice and finally, there is the unit self-test, which combines terminology with grammar exercises. The student has to achieve 60% out of the overall grade to pass on to the next unit.

The difference between the two types of tests is that the practice or progress test can be taken five times and the highest grade will be taken into consideration (in the on-line version), while the unit self-test can be taken only once. Usually if the students do well in the practice test they will be unlikely to fail the unit final test.

The examples below are taken from UNIT 6 Naval Equipment (II), Lights, Flags and Bells, printed version of the coursebook:

Vocabulary Practice

I.   Answer the following questions.
1.   Where is most of the equipment for signalling short distances located?
2.   What are the lines extending from the yardarm called?
3.   What are the square flags called which are used to send messages?
4.   What are the flags that are not square?
5.   What's another word for *attach*?
6.   What are the signal lights located on the signal bridge called?
7.   What are the signal lights located on the end of the yard called
8.   What are the switches used to operate yardarm blinkers?
9.   What is the signalling device used to sound out the time?
10.   What is the general term for safety lights found around the signal bridge?
11.   What is the running light called which is usually found on the upper part of the bridge superstructure?
12.   What running light is found above and abaft the masthead light?
13.   What are the red and green lights found on the starboard and port sides called?
14.   What is a searchlight?

II.   Identify all numbered equipment on the signal bridge and explain the functions of the items you list. Write your answers in the lettered spaces:
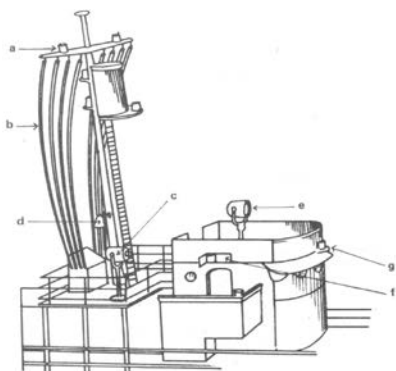
a._____
b._____
c._____
d._____
e._____
f._____
g._____

III. Complete the following sentences with the appropriate term(s)

1. Most of the equipment for signalling short distances is located on the___ ___
2. Lines called _____ extend from the yardarm.
3. Signal flags represent ____,____,or_____
4. On or near the signal bridge are _____ _____
5. On the outboard end of the yard are two small lights called_____ _____
6. _____ _____is mainly used to notify personnel on the ship of the time.
7. All ships that go to sea are required by international law to have____ _____
8. Running lights consist of a white____ ____ usually on the upper part of the bridge superstructure or on an area forward of the foremast.
9. Abaft and above the masthead light is a white ____ ____ located either on the foremast or mainmast.
10. There is a green light on the starboard side, and a red one on the port side. They are called_____

     As you may notice I used typical vocabulary exercises such as: answer the questions; fill in the blanks and diagrams to help students identify correctly the names and position of the different items found on the signal bridge. The definitions used in some exercises are taken from the unit text. In this way, the students may more easily retain both the term and the definition.
     The final unit test recycles the terms and definitions presented in the text plus grammar which was required in the practice test. At this stage translation exercises can be added to help reinforce the students` knowledge about the unit topic. The printed version obviously provides an answer-key to the test so that the student can check his/her achievement.
     Here is the Unit 6 self-test without the answer-key:

SELF-TEST

I. Fill in the blanks with appropriate term(s)
1. Most of the equipment for signalling short distances is located on or near the….
2. Lines called…..extend from the yardarm.
3. … ….represent letters of the alphabet, numbers, or complete meanings.
4. Flags and pennants are….. ….to the halyards and hoisted to the yard.
5. On or near the signal bridge are signal………………………………….
6. On the outboard end of the yard are two small lights called yardarm….
7. All ships that go to sea are required by international law to have …. ….
8. A white ….light is usually placed on the upper part of the bridge superstructure or on an area forward of the foremast.
9. Above and abaft the masthead light is a white…. ….located either on the foremast or mainmast.
10. To either side of the ship …. ….are found.   10p

II. Give Romanian equivalents to the following maritime terms.

    Signal flags; pennants; signal searchlights; halyards; signal bridge;
    yardarm blinkers; running light; masthead light; range lights; side lights   10p

III. Give complete answers to the following questions.

1. Where is located most of the equipment for signalling short distances?
2. Where can you find signal flags?
3. How are signal searchlights operated?
4. How do you call the two small lights on the outboard end of the yard?
5. What device do you use to tell the time at sea?
6. What lights must be exhibited according to the international laws?
7. Where is the range light located?
8. Is the searchlight a signalling equipment?
What colour is the masthead light?
What colour is the starboard side light? What about the port side light?   10p

IV. Put the verbs into the correct form, past simple or past continuous.
1. Jane **was waiting** (wait) for me when I **arrived** (arrive).
2. " What…(you/do) this time yesterday?" "I was asleep."
3. "….(you/go) out last night?" "No, I was too tired."
4. " Was Carol at the party last night?" " Yes, she …(wear) a really nice dress."
5. How fast…(you/drive) when the accident …(happen)?
6. John…(take) a photograph of me while I…(not/look).
7. We were in a very difficult position. We…(not/know) what to do.
8. I haven't seen Alan for ages. When I last…(see) him, he…(try) to find a job in London.   10p

V. Use the words given to make sentences. Do not change the order of the words. Use only the simple past or past continuous:
Example: Cathy/phone/the post office/when the parcel/arrive
           Cathy phoned the post office when the parcel arrived.

           when Don/arrive/we/have/coffee
           When Don arrived we were having coffee**.**
1. while he/walk/in the mountains/Henry/see/a bear
2 .the students/play/a game/when the professor/arrive
3.Felix/phone/the fire brigade/when the cooker/catch/fire
4.when the starter/fire/his pistol/the race/begin
5.I/walk/home/when it/start/to rain
6.when/Margaret/open/the door/the phone/ring
7.Cora/read/a letter/when Jimmy/phone/her
8.Andy/come/out of the restaurant/when he/see/Jenny
9.Charlie/cross the street/when he /see Mary
10.She/leave/the house/when the phone/start/to ring.   10p

Conclusions
Once the SeaTALK Project succeeds in providing the MET institutions with a common framework, there will no more be questions like:"What shall I teach in the 1st year?", "Is it meaningful for my students what I am teaching them?" or "Will the knowledge my students acquire in class/resource centre help them get recruited by crewing agencies and after that solve the challenging situations on-board?". As for the role of achievement progress and final tests included in the course teaching unit, most of my students strongly agree with the benefits derived from these types of quizzes, the end of term final test results wholly proving this.

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