Teaching Maritime English: A Linguistic Approach

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Abstract: The purpose of the paper is to outline the parameters of a LCC (linguistically centered concept) of developing ME (maritime English) teaching materials for non-native learners who are beginning their maritime academic career. The paper introduces initial notions on applying linguistic criteria as the basic ones in the process of creating ME textbooks. Through the historical development and under the influence of extra linguistic factors (globalization of the shipping industry, in particular), ME has accumulated and stored various resources being in current use: vocabulary, grammar and phonology, operational and semiotic systems, specific means of communication, functional models, patterns of narration and description, etc.. The proper linguistic analysis makes a secure foundation for methodology which can guarantee a better quality of ME course books for the 1st and 2nd year maritime students all over the world.

Key words: ME teaching materials, non-native learners, LCC, methodology.

1. Introduction

A LCC (linguistically centered concept) presumes priority of linguistic analysis in any study of ME (maritime English) oral and written texts meant for MET (maritime education and training) academic use. In case of any application of authentic materials for educational purposes, a language teacher should clearly understand the outcomes of such application in his/her practical work. Nowadays linguistics becomes very helpful in creating new teaching/learning materials for maritime students as it gives reliable grounds for methodology.

Any linguistic theory emerges from synchronic (concerned with the events at a particular period) or diachronic (concerned with phenomena as they change through time) research data and thus may be successfully applied in the process of teaching English as a foreign language. In comparison with theoretical language studies, applied linguistics is a pragmatic science. It is an interdisciplinary field that identifies, investigates and offers solutions to language-related real-life problems including education. Any detailed linguistic study in a format of a theory or a concept

aims to lay a foundation for designing systematized language classroom materials taking into account age, former experience and future occupation of learners. From this point of view, grammar translation method, for example, can not assist properly when training maritime cadets as members of multilingual crews.

Teachers do not use linguistics on a day-to-day basis, still their knowledge is based on linguistics. Linguistic approach suggests professionally correct ME curricula design when planning language classroom activities. For example, the starting point for describing ship's particulars is the language itself but not the technical essence of the subject.

The current situation in MET may be described as the scope of experiences in teaching ESP (English for specific purposes). A national level of MET when analyzed in the international context is of great concern for all specialists involved: authorities, researchers, language teachers and specialists trainers, publishers being busy with the search of efficient and flexible algorithm underlying the practice of ME teaching worldwide. In ME methodology, the most serious factors influencing this process are: (1) absence of consolidated methodological guidelines recognized by the Maritime Administration, (2) certain isolation of researchers of multiple national schools and traditions,

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(3) detachment of maritime English from general English practices and neglecting of the basic linguistic principle of integrity which aims to teach students in full-life communicative context and (4) insufficient development of an interdisciplinary concept implying the contacts between language teachers and professionals in navigation and marine engineering.

These issues are of great importance for MET institutions in the countries where English is taught for non-native learners. Some maritime nations produce a very eloquent statistics in manpower for shipping industry. According to BIMCO (Baltic and International Maritime Council), Eastern Europe has become significant with a large increase in officer numbers. The Far East and South East Asia, and the Indian sub-continent remain the largest sources of supply of ratings and are rapidly becoming a key source of officers. Thus, improved training and recruitment levels need to be maintained to ensure a future pool of suitably qualified and high caliber seafarers [1].

2. Maritime English through the Prism of Linguistic Theories

2.1 Maritime English as a Global Language and Lingua Franca

Maritime English is unanimously thought of as a global language used at sea. The definition of ME produced by the British Council focuses on its linguistic nature. ME is a product of life on the ocean itself, used for clear communication between ship and shore, between crew members, between crew and passengers, where the cost of communication breakdown can be damage to property, to the environment or loss of life. The attempt to bring some standardization into the terms and phrases used at sea initially came from two directions: from those who taught English to mariners and wrote books on the subject, and from the IMO (International Maritime Organization). Despite a widespread recognition that safety at sea and competency in English are

inextricably linked, it is often the technical side of training rather than the acquisition of linguistic competence. In any case, is increasing internationalization of ships' crews in fact leading to the creation of pidgin English on board [2]? The latter is mostly referred to situations when multinational, multicultural and multilingual crews perform work shoulder-to-shoulder at sea. The psychology of a restricted or isolated group manifests the specific behavior when inner dynamics suggests new modes of verbal and non-verbal communication. Working under pressure, the crew members often simplify or even change the common language in order to conduct their roles properly. In this case, ME becomes the only means of communication, or lingua franca. Lingua franca (working language, bridge language, vehicular language and common language) is a language systematically used to make communication possible between people not sharing a mother tongue. The nature of English being a living world language derives from the centuries-long experience of its use in different spheres: business, administration, finance, trade which facilitated significantly its application as a lingua franca at sea.

2.2 Maritime English as an Operational Language

Maritime English has distinct features of an operational language which may be explained both theoretically and pragmatically. Operational language is a language which reflects an operational behavior depending on what the speaker intends and how the listener will interpret this utterance. Operational (empirical) definitions attempt to specify operations coming along with observational data [3]. Hence, SMCP (standard marine communication phrases) is a comprehensive standardized safety language, precise, simple and unambiguous so as to avoid confusion and error [4]. From the linguistic point of view SMCP (developed on the principle of conventionalism, or agreement) represents a huge scope of terms and phrases denoting objects, notions, actions, procedures,

etc. used in everyday practice of mariners. Conventionalism is fundamental for the document as it is supported by the international community for use at sea and developed by IMO. Written in modern English, SMCP should be first studied as a part of vocabulary, a set of text samples and structural samples, then prefabricated in a specific way for language classroom activity and thereby delivered for practical work. The earlier this work is started, the better, since the main difficulty for students is the difference in general English and maritime English. For example, in the message "I require assistance" some students prefer saying "I need…". In the phrase "I am sinking" the error may occur through the wrong pronunciation ("*s*inking"—"*th*inking"). The idea of the international examination in the IMO-SMCP must be supported in connection with both general English proficiency and professional ME competence [5].

2.3 Maritime English as a System of Specialized Sublanguages

The system of maritime English is represented by different subsystems. It is an excellent opportunity to view ME as a compound entirety. The linguistic theory of subsystems/sublanguages boomed at the end of the 20th century and is still in use to explain functional variability of the language use under the influence of extra linguistic factors. Sociolinguistics distinguishes speech communities, more or less discrete groups of people who use language in a unique and mutually accepted way among themselves. Speech communities can be members of a profession with a specialized sublanguage to serve the group's special purposes and priorities. According to Kittredge [6], the definition of a sublanguage could identify a very large number of linguistic subsets as sublanguages. Sublanguages, or languages of restricted domains, are most frequently observed in technical and scientific communications. As a whole, ME is composed of several contrasting subsystems/sublanguages: (1) general English, (2) general ME, (3) ME for navigation, (4) ME for marine engineering, (5) ME for ship's documentation and correspondence, (6) ME for radio communication, (7) SMCP, (8) ME for IMO conventions, regulations, manuals, etc., (9) ME for semiotic systems, (10) ME for visual aids and others.

Thus being a construct, ME involves various language resources to create sublanguages. Evolution of sublanguages depends on extra linguistic motivation, or real world effects, such as particular historical events, technological developments, inventions, religion, culture, etc.. In its turn, ME evolution takes place mainly owing to development of its sublanguages. In this way language does not passively reflect reality; language actively creates reality. The grammar and the vocabulary shape our experience and transform our perceptions into meanings [7]. One of the examples which support the idea: modern dictionaries of maritime terms have been supplemented with the new entries "*lidar*" and "*ladar*" created according to "*radar*" pattern. "Radar" is an acronym of *ra*(dio) *d*(etecting) *a*(nd) *r*(anging). In case *light* is used to detect an object, we get *li*dar; if *laser* is applied, we call the new means of detecting objects—*la*dar. Many evolutionary shifts take place through the sublanguage enrichment due to innovations in technology which leads to the whole English language development.

The brief description below is proposed to understand ME sublanguages' nature:

(1) General English. This sublanguage is the foundation in ME training. The main concern is designing syllabi for universities when the problem arises to arrange teaching/learning materials according to modules to achieve the better correlation with ME training;

(2) General ME. It is represented by language resources used in language samples (oral and written) on the subjects common for both navigators and marine engineers. This sublanguage contains the core ME vocabulary ("*maritime*", "*marine*", "*naval*", "*nautical*", "*craft*", "*ship*", "*vessel*", "*engine*", "*navigation*", "*sea*", "*ocean*", "*sail*", "*cargo*" used in multiple collocations),

as well as general English vocabulary, general science terms (nouns and verbs), basic structural elements, phonology;

(3) ME for navigation. The sublanguage originates from the sailors and explorers of the seas and waters. It may be considered as one of the oldest sublanguages in the history of the world. Primarily based on descriptions of sailing craft and sailing techniques, it significantly changed in the course time owing to specialization and modernization through technological innovations (new types of vessels, invention of sextant and nautical charts) which opened the perspectives for further developments. The broadside-cannoned full-rigged 16th-century sailing ship provided Europe with a weapon to dominate the world. The global nature of the British Empire manifested after the 17th century. The British Empire was a maritime empire, and the influence of nautical terms on the English language has been great. Nowadays the sublanguage incorporates other subsystems—physics, mathematics, mechanics, astronomy, geography, astronavigation, oceanography, meteorology, cartography, etc.;

(4) ME for marine engineering. The current use of ME in this sublanguage is based on the historical descriptions of prime mover developments, the development of the diesel engine and other innovation equipment. In 1673 Christian Huygens, a Dutch scientist, produced the first known heat engine from his inspiration of a cannon. Further evolution is marked by scientific and technological achievements. The sublanguage comprises multiple sub-subsystems: mechanics, mathematics, physics, thermodynamics, hydraulics, electrical and mechanical engineering, radio and electronic engineering, IT, etc.;

(5) ME for ship's documentation and correspondence. The sublanguage is shaped under the influence of the principles of written business English. The purpose of the sublanguage is to maintain records and compile correspondence of any kind to ensure a vessel's proper functioning;

(6) ME for radio communication. According to researchers, VHF (very high frequency) radiotelephony is a specific realization of maritime English. The sublanguage plays a crucial role in maritime safety being based on skills of speaking and listening when fluency and spontaneity are required;

(7) SMCP. The sublanguage provides a set of terms, definitions, phrases used onboard ship, for ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communication. The standardized wordings of SMCP foresee their clear, unmistakable use which requires perfect pronunciation and functionally appropriate application of phrases;

(8) IMO conventions, regulations, recommendations, manuals. The sublanguage may be referred to business English and technical documentation comprising specific ME terminology and syntax incorporating distinct features of Maritime Law and Law of the Sea, as well as management and administration;

(9) ME semiotic systems. A sign is understood as a discrete unit of meaning in semiotics. It is defined as something that stands for something, to someone in some capacity. It may cover all of the ways in which information can be communicated as a message. The ICS (international code of signals), a phonetic alphabet alongside verbal expressions, represent the system of messages and warnings for safe navigation;

(10) ME for visual aids. This is represented by geographic and oceanographic maps, nautical charts, graphs, tables, pictures, diagrams and all other additional tools which require verbal interpretation and presentation skills.

2.4 What is Maritime English?

Some definitions of ME are cited here, in particular:

(1) Peter Trenkner: Maritime English is an entirety of all those means of the English language which, being used as a device for communication within the international maritime community, contribute to the safety of navigation and the facilitation of the seaborne trade [8];

(2) Boris Pritchard: Linguistically, maritime English

is not any separate language but just a conventional label for a subset or realization of English language appropriate, in our case, to a specific maritime setting (e.g. in the act of navigation, in a close-quarters situation, a cargo handling operation, an act of reading operational or maintenance manual for the auxiliary engine, etc.), used in a determined context of situation (i.e. in a specific speech community, in speech events influenced by a number of factors creating and receiving the message or spoken interaction in communication), arising and being shaped under specific sociolinguistic circumstances (speaker-hearer relationships, developing under various degrees of stress) [9].

The idea of P. Trenkner to provide the language teachers with a handy linguistic and pedagogical label allowing for a narrow and wider sense of the term "maritime English" is extremely fruitful. It motivates the ME community to understand in detail all aspects of the phenomenon called "maritime English".

In the present paper ME is considered from the point of view of socio-functional linguistics. Maritime English is a professional subsystem of the English language, developed through history on the basis of various language resources in response to the society's requirements in the domain of seafaring and shipping. ME is the set of specialized (mainly, technical) sublanguages interacting among themselves to describe in the most appropriate manner all material and non-material entities known in maritime affairs.

As any other specialized professional subsystem, maritime English may be observed, interpreted, studied and described with the help of different linguistic theories such as psycholinguistics, functional grammar, comparative and contrastive linguistics, demonstrating that language signifies certain instrumentalities purposing intentions of a man to represent thoughts to other men for the sake of communication. Being communicative, conventional and operational, ME requires further detailed research which will eventually provoke creation of new pedagogical trends.

3. Methodological Insights

Methodology is known as a body of practices, procedures and rules created by those who work in the discipline. As far as maritime English is a highly socio-oriented subject, the teaching methods should be based rather on acquisition (the process by which humans acquire the capacity to perceive and comprehend language interactively) than on learning (when students have conscious knowledge about the new language, but do not communicate it). Fortunately, maritime cadets have the opportunity of real-life socializing through professional activities during their first sea voyages. In this context, the idea of early specialization may be helpful. Early specialization in ME training implies the introductory course implementation from the first semester of ME curriculum. The priorities are given to general English competency which includes abundant communicative work on the level of a sentence/phrase and a text/description, narration, etc..

LCC presumes the implementation of units of GE (general English) language at the input aiming the assessment of ME abilities as the outcome through skills development. Thus, a linguistically centered course model for the 1st and 2nd year maritime English learners becomes a step-by-step problem-solving procedure.

• Step 1. Defining modules and units. This step presets blocks of units based on the functional principles of GE materials arranged thematically: personal details (occupation, country, language, nationality), information about people (home, family. education, likes and dislikes), places and locations, daily routine (functions and duties), motions and directions, living and non-living objects, processes, changes and results, the whole and its parts, comparisons, ways of doing things (active and passive), past events, future actions, attitudes to things, people and events (modality), classifications.

• Step 2. Developing skills. This section represents parameters of practical acquisition of GE and ME

through interaction and textual work in speaking, reading, listening and writing. Selection of series of tasks for the language classroom activities is decisive in creating maritime communicative context.

• Step 3. Attaining abilities in ME. This part describes the material, further skills development and abilities in ME according to IMO course model. It covers filling up documents, taking part in interviews; understanding and using maritime code words, numbers and letters for onboard and external communication; describing one's professional duties and routine; understanding and using geographical names; defining ships types, particulars, parts, spaces; understanding and expressing information about ship's equipment including safety equipment; understanding and responding SMCP in routine and emergency situations; keeping watch; understanding and responding messages in VHF communications, etc..

• Step 4. Performing assessment. This step is represented by the parameters of academic control of language proficiency level, scope of materials, thematic contents and contents for different skills, frequency and types of control, tasks for individual work, etc.. Efficiency of assessment is usually evaluated through ME national and international standards and may be measured in terms of certification.

4. Conclusions

The idea of early specialization implies the introductory course implementation from the first semester of ME course. The introductory ME course is conducted alongside the general English course which

is completely justified for non-native learners. Maritime English is understood as a construct of many sublanguages which effects the selection of ME teaching materials. The linguistically centered course model makes the emphasis on the language itself. Hence a language teacher develops methods and techniques different from a specialist instructor but constantly works in contact with the latter. This algorithm facilitates the further process of acquiring professional knowledge, skills and abilities.

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