

# A Basic Study on Maritime English Education and the Need for Raising the Instructor Profile

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**Abstract :** *English is the accepted common working language of the maritime world and being competent in its use is essential to the safety of ships, their crews and the marine environment. This paper is a response to the urgent need to find a suitable solution to the problem of providing maritime students with quality instruction in Maritime English. This paper will show what type of English instructor is best suited to help cadets have at least a basic grasp of Maritime English communication, with a view to possessing the level required by STCW 95 within the shortest time. It presents ways that maritime institutes can develop their own qualified or 'marinated' English Instructors and what qualifications should be required. It is concluded that by further essential research, interviews and questionnaires etc., the language needs of the university and shipping industry in Korea as a whole can be clearly verified. By examining such data, the present language education systems can be evaluated as to efficacy and relevance, allowing the establishment and implementation of 'best practice' within the training institute. This will result in making excellent informed decisions and choices about how best to improve the language competencies of graduating cadets, thereby creating the catalyst for the success of future seafarers whilst raising the image of the institute and Korean shipping worldwide*

**Key words :** *Maritime English Instructor, communication, marinate, twinning, teacher training*

## 1. Introduction

More than 86% of all SOLAS vessels, according to Trenkner(2007), who is the Principal author of IMO SMCP, are presently crewed with multilingual personnel who, for diverse reasons, are frequently unable to render the Maritime English language skills required, risking and even causing damage to lives, property and the environment(Trenkner, 2007). Although the shipping industry is trying to deal with these problems, the largest portion of responsibility in looking for solutions surely falls on the shoulders of the educators and institutes from where these trainee seafarers and future officers are originating from.

In recent years, Maritime English has become a subject receiving more and more attention. Although there has been comparatively little research conducted and papers published on ways to improve this situation in non-English speaking countries, the author has done an in-depth review of available literature and popular opinion by those few people who have extensive knowledge and experience in the specialized field of Maritime English education.

The review of literature involved a study of books,

journals, bulletins and internet sources. Internet searches generated information from independent professional organizations closely involved with the United Nations' specialized agency responsible for improving maritime safety and preventing pollution from ships, namely the International Maritime Organization(IMO). Literature was reviewed until saturation was achieved for all possible factors and/or solutions that could have an effect on improving the Maritime English Education in the Republic of Korea. In addition, some Maritime academies in the Asian Pacific region have been highlighted due to their recent improvements in teacher recruitment and training, as well as the continued promotion and enabling of 'marinisation' of the English instructor.

## 2. Literature Review

Most investigators into accidents at sea state that 80% are attributable to human error and Trenkner stated in The International Maritime Human Element Bulletin 'Alert' that "onethirdofaccidentshappenprimarilyduetoalackofMaritimeEnglishskills"(Trenkner, 2007). In an industry such as shipping where the common working language (English) is often the

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second language for almost all crew members language problems can quickly become a big issue. Add to this an often dangerous, noisy and stressful work environment where possibly up to 24 individuals of differing rank, work, eat and sleep together for weeks at a time and we have a recipe for potential disaster through miscommunication. Short(2006), who is the Marine Director of Australasian Maritime Education Services noted that during early training, it is important to raise awareness that English, improves communicative ability with other crew members, facilitates social harmony and consolidates teamwork on board, which, in emergency situations, can be vital to the safety of everyone (Short, 2006). In an important report published in 2001 by the Seafarers International Research Centre a discussion regarding communication difficulties and the effects caused by this were investigated. From the crews of 14 ships surveyed the number of English native speakers was noticeably less than half (see Table 1).

Table 1 Native speaker’s on board case study vessels

Ship	Number of Nationalities	Number of English ‘native’ Speakers
1	3	0
2	4	7/36
3	2	0
4	3	14/37
5	3	1/7
6	4	14/29
7	3	0
8	3	0
9	6	4/25
10	5	2/34
11	4	0
12	6	1/7
13	14	0
14	5	0

Source: Seafarers’ International Research Centre (SIRC) Cardiff, UK 2001.

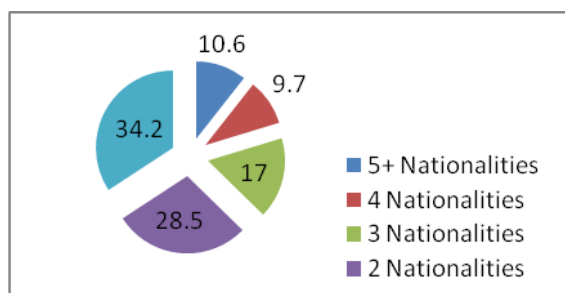


Figure 1 Number of Nationalities On Board

Source: Seafarers’ International Research Centre (SIRC) Cardiff, UK 2001.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of different nationalities onboard the study vessels. It demonstrates the full extent of trans-nationalism in world shipping, showing again the importance of providing future seafarers with comprehensive language training.

Although some good work is being done to improve the English language skills of cadets at maritime academies throughout the Asian Pacific region, the recognition of the need to raise teaching standards in maritime institutes continues to be emphasized. According to Madsen (2006, CEO of Det Norske Veritas), 50% of academies surveyed were operating in a sub-standard manner (Madsen, H. 2006). This is despite The Safety of Life at Sea Convention (SOLAS) being enforced by the IMO to promote safety issues resulting from a lack of a common language for seafarers. An IMO committee review in 1995 recommended: “The International Maritime Organization promotes the mandatory use of IMO Maritime English in training schemes for both officers and ratings” (SOLAS Review Inquiry 1995).

At the International Seminar on Maritime English given in 2002, Winbow (2002, IMO Board of Governors member) recognized the difficulty in teaching Maritime English but stated that the responsibility of those who teach English to seafarers is a major one (Winbow, 2002). It is the Maritime English (ME) providers at maritime academies that are in the best position to improve the status of ME education thereby improving safety on board. The research done by those with a considerable amount of experience in the field of ME education clearly demonstrate the urgent need to find more effective ways of helping cadets gain at least basic working knowledge of ME. Without continual improvement, the safety of sea personnel, the ships and ports they operate in, as well as the fragile marine environment that we all depend upon will continue to be at risk.

### 3. A Typology of Maritime English Instructors

There are several options available to MET institutions regarding instructors. Here is a brief outline of each along with their usefulness and limitations. It is postulated that the career specialist will be the most effective choice in solving the present language problems faced.

#### 3.1 Career Specialist

Characteristics:

- Graduates / Qualified teachers
- Good at ESP

- Have a reasonable institutional standing
- May or may not be qualified to teach ME

This type of teacher is often capable at ESP (English for Special Purposes) because of a long teaching experience. They have to be willing to become 'marinated' by learning about maritime matters. Usually this type of teacher is respected by others in the institution as they often can cooperate with other colleagues in a professional way. Occasionally at maritime universities in the Republic of Korea, instructors have been willing to give their classes a maritime flavor (Davy, J. 2008) but lack essential knowledge and receive little support or assistance. This type of teacher needs to be motivated to become more involved in the field by becoming 'marinated'. There are a number of ways this can be done. One possibility is to send the teacher aboard active merchant vessels or training vessels for at least half a year or for shorter intervals if repeated. Cole, Pritchard and Trenkner specifically noted that although having certification in areas such as GMDSS, deck or engineering qualification are not necessary for ME instructors (Cole, Pritchard & Trenkner, 2007).

The training ships operated by maritime universities would provide an excellent means for a teacher to acquire the necessary maritime background knowledge. It is also suggested that shipping companies who have a direct interest in quality training are likely to accept such teachers on board their vessels for the cost of room and meals, by providing the crew with "free" on-the-job English language training. Cole et al.(2007) specifically noted that this kind of experience can be highly motivating, as it not only allows the future specialist to soak up all kinds of maritime information from the maritime environment but also results in sufficient knowledge and hands-on experience being gained for sound and effective ME teaching to be practiced (Cole, Pritchard & Trenkner March 2007). This experience also directly helps in the classroom as the teacher, confronted by a class of future seafarers, would gain respect and credibility as someone with experience of life on board.

If maritime universities were to encourage and promote this kind of instructor, many of the basic problems regarding language acquisition would be solved. At the Qingdao Ocean Shipping Mariner's College for example, successful implementation of English educational programs have been applied. To qualify as an ME instructor time is spent with an experienced ME lecturer, followed by a contracted period of on board experience, either aboard the schools training ships or an active merchant ship

(International Maritime Lecturers Association, 2002).

Cole, Pritchard and Trenkner suggest that the technical subject teacher works alongside an ME instructor who would support the class before or after. This is termed 'twinning'. The essence of this approach is what is known as Content Based and Communicative Language Teaching that involves the partnering of technical subjects with Maritime English. This would be a good practical solution, helping to raise the reputation of the ME instructor and promote the English teaching proficiency of the non-native professor. Introducing the idea of 'twinning' would be a positive step forward in improving this situation.

### 3.2 English Language and Literature Graduates

Characteristics:

- lovers of English
- not necessarily good at teaching
- prefer general teaching to ESP
- fail to meet the STCW standards

This type of teacher usually holds a university degree in English literature or linguistics. They tend to be less interested in ME and are not trained for the task. Occasionally, this type of teacher can develop and upgrade their teaching skills, especially if young, in order to satisfy the requirements of STCW.

Certain maritime institutes already employ full-time instructors who fall into this category. Until now however, most of the language needs of the cadets have been largely unmet. Due to the fact that better qualified personnel are not at the disposal of the academy, the management often does not ask too much about what exactly is being taught in classes. Relevance of class content and lack of technical subject understanding has produced dissatisfaction throughout faculty members and student body further suggesting that other alternatives need to be considered.

### 3.3 Former Seafarers

Characteristics:

- Technical experts, but often not skilled at English or at teaching English
- Often over-challenge students
- Capable of delivering technical subjects in English

Most maritime institutions believe that this type of teacher is a good solution. Of course, this type of person is not easy to find and often unwilling to take a job that is financially less attractive than their onboard position. If a

former seafarer were to successfully complete an English language teaching course then this could be a good solution, however such a person is rare to find. The time, training and funding needed to qualify as a teacher is a further obstacle that most seasoned sea personnel and institutes are unwilling to undergo. Cole et al.(2007) seriously question the suitability of ex deck and engineer officers. After observing many maritime English classes given by former seafarers they concluded the following:

1. The teachers (non-natives) command of English was often very poor
2. The students were often over-challenged and therefore unable to understand the subject
3. Teaching was often disorganized and basic teaching skills were absent
4. Classes did not follow a curriculum, and students were unable to follow their progress due to lack of revision, preparation and review.(Cole et. al 2007)

For a number of years, maritime universities in the Republic of Korea have asked former non-Korean officers to deliver lectures in English to senior cadets. These instructors have not been teaching ME but rather technical subjects in English. Therefore, this kind of instructor fits more accurately that of the instructor type mentioned later in section 3.5. Although some positive work has been done and there has been a passion for subject matter, very few long term benefits have been seen due to the aforementioned problems. Recently, therefore, universities have looked to the second type of teacher, English literature / linguistics graduates, in the hopes of improving the situation by providing all freshmen with courses in general English conversation.

#### 3.4 Native English Speakers (backpackers; housewives, spouses etc)

Characteristics:

- Employed to motivate students to listen and speak English
- Often not skilled at English or teaching
- Rarely have knowledge of maritime matters
- Usually employed on short-term contracts

This type of teacher usually works on a yearly contract and although students can gain some motivation, they seldom have adequate teaching skills, maritime knowledge and qualifications. This can lead to serious problems for the

institute since they are unable to satisfy the needs of the STCW 95 standards. For more than three years, certain maritime universities have hired such teachers to motivate their cadets. It has been mostly the case that such short-term contracted instructors lack the necessary teaching skills and understanding of how to help future seafarers succeed. A lack of passion and interest in students and maritime issues in general further aggravates this situation. It is clear that institutes must be able to provide cadets with ME instructors who are effective at helping them succeed at becoming competent users of Maritime English.

#### 3.5 A special group

This final group is comprised of non-native (Korean) teachers of technical subjects who are encouraged or ordered to use English in their classes. They are rarely qualified to teach in English and their language skills are often very low. However, management often views them as a financially acceptable way to give students exposure to ME even though they fail to meet STCW 95 standards. Often lacking the necessary teaching skills, they fail to help their students improve, despite their knowledge and passion for their subject. How then can these aims and improvements best be implemented in a maritime academy? This paper will now look at some of the requirements that need to be met by ME instructors and ways in which the university can foster these in a supportive and economical environment.

### 4. New Directions in Establishing the Professional Profile of Maritime English Instructors

In order to qualify teachers of English to become instructors of Maritime English a certain level of linguistic and pedagogical knowledge is required, meeting at least the requirements of STCW 95 and other relevant legal instruments. Naturally, the instructor also needs to be able to adjust to the particular learning level of the students. This would be done by first conducting a needs analysis of the academy, describing the aims, objectives and expected learning outcomes. By conducting a series of surveys with current and former cadets, on board seafarers, maritime educators and shipping companies, a review of current teaching, testing and recruiting policies would help in identifying specific language areas that need addressing. These would then be used to develop comprehensive ways of helping the academy provide holistic methods of English

language instruction and testing.

The ME instructor should give careful consideration to teaching students ways of using English in practical situations such as:

- The ability to analyze and handle interpersonal relationships
- Conflict resolution and cultural tolerance
- Non-verbal communication modes
- Understanding of officer/rating relationships in different cultures
- Awareness of cultural and religious differences, and social etiquette

Cole and Trenkner(2007) recommend that the ideal ME instructor, besides having teaching qualifications, should undergo an obligatory period of successful 'marinisation', which in line with those mentioned at the METTS seminar in 2008 include:

- Knowledge and competence of the main ME linguistic features and teaching methodology.
- Acquiring STCW watch keeping certificates (Cole, Pritchard, Trenkner, 2005).
- ME teachers working (twinning) more frequently and more intensively with the maritime-technical subject teachers.
- Holding a part of the ME classes on board ship, in a realistic environment, with lots of hands-on activities both in the case of navigating and engineering students, or performing it in simulators (The METTS Seminar, 2008).

Acquiring STCW watch keeping certificates (Cole, Pritchard, Trenkner, 2005).

Acquiring such knowledge and competence is a lengthy process that requires dedication and cooperation between the maritime institute and ME teacher. Through participation in conferences, seminars, workshops and self-education the possibility of producing career specialist ME instructors would become a reality. This would have substantial long-term benefits not just for improving the profile of instructor and institute but also of boosting the international reputation of Korean shipping.

If the maritime academy administration is to require a teacher to complete some kind of maritime training course, then opportunities and incentives have to be created and organized to enable and motivate the instructor to meet

those requirements. The setting up of institutional qualifications would be an important part of this. In other words, the institute would create its own qualification measures for prospective ME teachers based upon the experiences of other academies and on their own unique needs. This would include:

- 'Twinning' programs, where the ME instructor works with technical subject teachers.
- On-board qualification, where the instructor becomes part of the teaching staff on board training ships, often teaching hands-on English.
- An opportunity to board an active merchant ship, the successful completion of which the teacher receives certification and promotion.

Furthermore, ME instructors should be encouraged to attend IMO model courses (IMO Model Course 3.17 MEITC, etc.), courses offered by World Maritime University and those arranged by IAMU. They should be encouraged to develop self-education and self-training by attending ME conferences and workshops, contributing papers and workshops (Cole, Pritchard, Trenkner, 2005).

The English Language centre at the Maritime State University, located in Vladivostok, Russia began implementing such teacher training programs and continues to upgrade. Small classes are the norm and installation of excellent multi-media equipment has helped students as well as technical subject teachers to use ME as almost second nature. The help of the Association of Maritime Educations and Training Asia Pacific (AMETIAP) founded in 1996 has proved invaluable in forming the training programs in Vladivostok as well as other areas such as P.R. China, the Philippines and Hong Kong (GlobalMet, 1994).

## 5. Conclusion

The need to define and develop the requirements and qualifications of ME instruction in order to prepare graduates for effective communication at sea is very apparent. The different types of teachers mentioned in section 3 all contribute in some way to the improvement of ME education, but it can be clearly seen that the promotion of the career specialist, and the development of a teacher training program with incentives is the best way forward in reaching international requirements and at the same time provide effective learning strategies.

It is modestly suggested by the author that maritime

institutes support and develop a series of specially designed 'marinating' programs to assist ME instructors in acquiring the appropriate language competencies and minimum background knowledge as required by STCW 95. Due to the limitations of this paper, it is also strongly suggested that further research into the present condition of ME at institutes in the Republic of Korea be carried out. This would be in the form of interviews and surveys aimed at collecting the ideas and opinions of all parties involved. By collecting data from those on board and from shipping companies as well, regarding the present situation and immediate needs of the industry, it could be clearly ascertained in which areas need priority attention. To successfully carry out further research it is proposed that application for a government grant be made so that research is carried out in the best possible way. Having the support of a government grant would also significantly raise awareness that ME education is an issue that affects not just cadets but also crew members and society at large. By using the results of future research, including a needs analysis and improving the profile of the ME instructor, the author believes that maritime universities in the Republic of Korea will have a clear advantage in the shipping world as it is able to satisfy the needs of graduating cadets and merchant ship companies, and more importantly contribute to the urgent need to make our ships safer and our oceans cleaner.

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