The Comparisons of Pronunciation Teaching in Lingua Franca Core and IMO Maritime English Model Course 3.17 for Global Communication at Sea

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Abstract : As the International Maritime English Organization (IMO) model course for Maritime English has been recently revised and updated, the requirements of current changes to both the 2010 STCW Manila Amendments and English education have been actively reviewed. In order to provide practical guidelines for language teaching, a wide range of new pedagogical approaches and their theoretical backgrounds are also suggested. However, considering the current spread of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) and its critical importance in maritime communication, the pedagogical approaches need to be re-evaluated, specifically in terms of teaching pronunciation in order to emphasize clear and effective communication among international interlocutors. Therefore, the core pedagogical elements of pronunciation should be clearly set and provided with consideration for Lingua Franca Core (LFC), which places importance on mutual intelligibility rather than following the rules of native speakers. In this paper, the current trends of BELF in the maritime industry will thus be introduced. Following this, the importance of LFC in maritime communication will be outlined, and its key features will be discussed in terms of effectiveness and clarity of international maritime communications. Finally, a close comparison between LFC and the pronunciation guidelines suggested by the IMO Maritime English model course 3.17 will be conducted, and pedagogical implications for future teaching pronunciation in cross-cultural global maritime industry will be suggested.

Key words : IMO English model course 3.17, Lingua franca core, Business English as a lingua franca, Effective and clear communication at sea, Teaching pronunciation, Mutual intelligibility, Cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

Successful communication at sea is directly linked to clear and complete delivery and receipt of the target message between interlocutors. It can be said that speakers' effective delivery of their intended message, and listeners' precise decoding and accurate understanding, are the keys to successful maritime communication(Jeong, Park, and Jeong, 2010). In terms of effective and clear delivery of the message, therefore, the key communicative features, which are directly linked to intelligibility, need to be reconceptualized from a practical point of view. In doing this, several factors in the current international maritime industry should be considered: the distribution of seafarers from non-native-English regions, such as Asia and Eastern Europe, are considerably high; the number of crew members belonging to these areas is expected to increase in the future(BIMCO, 2010); and, therefore, those from non-native-English countries will constitute a majority group within international sea communication.

In order to provide clear guidelines for teaching key communicative features at sea, IMO English Model Course 3.17 has been published and recently updated by accommodating a wide range of traditional and up-to-date language teaching and/or training theories and pedagogies. In terms of teaching speaking, however, more weight still seems to have been put on traditional views, which focus on "nativeness", rather than global intelligibility. From this perspective, the guidelines included in these sections, such as teaching pronunciation, connected speech, word stress and stress-/syllable- timed language needs to be re-evaluated under the consideration of Business English as Lingua Franca(BELF) and Lingua Franca Core(LFC), which are the current mainstream forms of English communication in the international business context and focus on mutual intelligibility between international interlocutors, regardless of their language backgrounds.

In this paper, therefore, these two theories, BELF and

LFC, will be briefly introduced, and their key linguistic features outlined. After that, the theories and practical pedagogical approaches suggested by IMO English Model Course 3.17 will be closely analyzed and compared with those of LFC. Following this, the theories will be analyzed in detail in order to draw pedagogical implications and provide a desirable future direction of teaching speaking in a way that will meet the practical language needs of the international maritime industry.

2. English in a Global Business Context

2.1 Business English as a Lingua Franca

English as a Lingua Franca(ELF) has been widely accepted as a practical communicative tool in world communication between speakers 'who share neither a common native tongue nor a common(national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication'(Firth, 1996, p.240). When narrowing its focus down specifically to business interaction in a lingua franca setting, the term BELF can also be used as a similar concept(Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta, 2005). No matter which is used, these terms can be seen as representing a functional language system intended to facilitate effective communication between non-native speakers in multi-cultural settings. However, BELF is not necessarily confined to non-native speakers' communication, but rather can be expanded to communication between native and non-native speakers(Seidlhofer, 2009), even though this takes a small portion of (B)ELF interactions considering that native speakers only account for 25% of the world's English users(Crystal, 2003). The distribution of speakers in the BELF environment is very similar to that of the world maritime industry; as BIMCO(2010) clearly suggests in its BIMCO/ICS manpower report, the supply of seafarers are largely from non-native-English countries, such as Asia and Eastern Europe, and this phenomenon is expected to be maintained in the future. Considering the global seafarer supply by geographical area, therefore, the majority group of English maritime communication is expected to no longer be native speakers, but rather non-native speakers who speak a wide range of variations of English(e.g. so-called Konglish, Chinglish and Indoglish).

IMO Model Course 3.17 also recognizes the BELF nature of the international maritime shipping industry by emphasizing the importance of the multi-culturalarity and linguistic variations in real sea communication, as clearly stated below(IMO Maritime English Model Course, p.143):

··· It is certainly not necessary to aspire to speak 'the Queen's English'. There are more people now speaking English as their second language than there are native speakers. We also have to remember that there are a range of 'Englishes', i.e. accepted variations of English with particular accents and linguistic styles e.g. Indian English, Sri Lankan English, Malaysian English, Australian English; this is a very pertinent discussion area in EFL(English as a Foreign Language) in this era of global communication.

Considering this arising phenomenon of English communication in the global business context, accordingly, the future focus should be on effective and clear communication for the achievement of given communicative goals based on mutual intelligibility in a multicultural setting, as emphasized by the IMO STCW convention (2010). That is, the traditional paradigm in language teaching and education whereby the aim is to conform to and follow the norms of native-English speakers have been greatly challenged, giving rise to the belief that the time has now come to change this paradigm(Kachru & Nelson, 2001; Björkman, 2008; Firth, 2009; Koester, 2010).

2.2 Lingua Franca Core

In order to meet the practical needs of global English communication in which a variety of 'Englishes' are spoken in real business interactions, the concept of LFC was created. The key value of LFC is a mutual intelligibility between BELF speakers in a verbal communicative environment. Given that around 90% of miscommunication has been reported as arising from speakers' pronunciation problems, rather than syntactic structures and/or choice of lexis(IMO Model Course 3.17, p.143), the importance of this in English education cannot be underestimated. However, LFC throws a question to the traditional language teaching methodologies in speaking, in that the native speakers' pronunciation, accents and intonation can be accepted as a norm of current English education, specifically where mutual intelligibility in cross-cultural communication should be regarded as a key element to be considered. Research on this has been actively conducted by many linguists around the world, and has challenged the strong

beliefs and expectations of the past that native speakers are the best listeners and the most intelligible speakers in global communication(Crystal, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2009; Firth, 2009). In the early 1990s, Smith(1992) posed a question on this issue and reported that native speakers' phonology was no more intelligible than that of non-native speakers, and that their understanding of other English varieties was not high enough in the global context.

From this perspective, the core of communication in the BELF setting was suggested by Jenkins(2005), wherein the focus is on mutual intelligibility in cross-cultural communication. The key features of LFC compared to the traditional English Language Teaching(ELT) are suggested in Table 1(Zoghbor, 2011).

Table 1 Pronunciation teaching in traditional ELT and LFC

	Aspects of pronunciation	ELT targets	ELF targets	Influ. to intell.
1	The consonantal inventory	All sounds RP non-rhotic /r/ GA rhotic /r/ RP intervocalic [t] GA intervocalic [t]	All sounds except /θ/ and /ð/ Rhotic /r/ only Intervocalic [t] only	Yes but not all
2	Phonetic requirements	Rarely specified	Aspiration after /p/, /t/, and /k/ Appropriate vowel length before fortis/lenis consonants	Yes but not all
3	Consonant cluster	All word positions	Word initially, word medially	Yes but not all
4	Vowel quantity	Long-short contrast	Long-short contrast	Yes
5	Vowel quality	Close to RP or GA	L2 (consistent) regional qualities	No
6	Weak forms	Essential	Unhelpful to intelligibility	No
7	Features of connected speech	All	Inconsequential or unhelpful	No
8	Stress-time rhythm	Important	Does not exist	No
9	Word stress	Critical	Unnecessary / can reduce flexibility	No
10	Nuclear stress	Important	Critical	Yes

When the linguistic features of LFC are carefully examined, their distinctive characteristics can be summarized as follows(Walker, 2010): Core features and non-core features that are divided into the categories of no impact and negative impact on ELF intelligibility.

The four core features of LFC are as follows:
- Every consonant sound excluding /θ/ and /ð/
- Consonant cluster (e.g. speed, straight, distress)
- Vowels specifically for long-short differences
- Nuclear stress placement

Non-core features of LFC are as follows:
Group 1) No impact on ELF intelligibility
① Pitch movement (tone)
② Word stress
③ Stress-timing

Group 2) Negative impact on ELF intelligibility
① Vowel reduction, schwa and weak forms
② Connected speech

As can be observed from Table 1 and the summary suggested above, the core features of LFC focus neither on the nativeness nor on a specific variety of native Englishes, or the General America(GA) or British Received Pronunciation(RP). Regardless of their origins, what LFC pays attention to is largely which sounds would be more intelligible and which features can be phonetically more distinguishable from one another in global communication (e.g. /r/ in GA and /t/ in RP). This could be a reasonable criteria to define the tolerable and acceptable limit of 'deviations both segmental and supra-segmental aspects of pronunciation' that the IMO maritime English model course considers(IMO Model Course 3.17, p.143).

In the next section, the guidelines for teaching pronunciation in IMO model course 3.17 will be briefly reviewed and compared with the features of LFC in order to explore practical implications for teaching and discuss the future direction of designing a pronunciation class under the consideration of current geographical distribution of seafarers in the international shipping industry.

3. IMO Maritime English Model Course 3.17 – Teaching Speaking

The IMO Maritime English Model Course 3.17 has been recently revised, reflecting the systematic development of

learners' English competencies from General Maritime English to Specialized Maritime English. To aid maritime English instructors with practical classroom design, a teachers' manual has been also provided in Part D, with several sub-categories. Of these, teaching pronunciation is one of the major sections, together with grammar and vocabulary, in providing a teaching guideline to English language systems. In the updated version, the importance of pronunciation and its multi-culturality at sea is highly appreciated, and its flexibility to incorporate a range of English varieties is also well recognized. In this regard, it shares quite similar views with those of LFC in terms of situational awareness to teaching pronunciation in the global context. With regards to the theoretical background from which to approach this issue, however, the detailed suggestions do not seem to be aligned with those of LFC detailed in Table 1. The guideline provided by IMO Maritime English Model Course 3.17 for teaching pronunciation can be largely summarized as follows:

Group 1) Individual sounds
Group 2) Connected speech
  ① Linking(e.g. The ship is old and unsafe.)
  ② Contractions(e.g. My name's Ivan, I've got two children)
  ③ The schwa
  ④ Strong vs weak structure words(e.g. Where are you going to?)
  ⑤ Elision (e.g. What's (h)er name?, Why's (h)e late?)
  ⑥ Assimilation: (e.g. on Monday (om Monday))
Group 3) Word stress
Group 4) Intonation and pitch

As listed above, the linguistic features to be taught to language learners according to the model course seem outdated, as they are highly oriented toward the native speakers' side. That is, even though the model course fully acknowledges the new paradigm of English education in a global maritime context, the response to enhancing communication through speaking in this environment seems to move in the opposite direction.

There are some issues to be discussed in this regard. First, the types of individual sounds to be particularly emphasized to learners for the enhancement of mutual intelligibility need to be more clearly defined, as in LFC. Even though a wide range of useful pedagogical approaches

(e.g. chain drills and minimal pairs) that can be directly applied to actual classrooms are suggested in detail, and this could be utilized as a helpful tool for language instructors in managing their pronunciation classes, guidelines regarding which phonemes(or which means of pronunciation) can be the most intelligible in an actual international communication scenario(e.g. /r/ in GA and /t/ in RP) need to be more clearly defined and suggested. These efforts could be an answer to the following statement specified in the model course(p.143):

Much of the spoken English that seafarers encounter is informal and is spoken in a range of international and regional accents. As accent forms part of the speaker's identity and is acceptable so long as it does not prevent the speaker being understood.

In this regard, the following questions could be considered as responses to the above statement: What are the critical phonological factors to enhance intelligibility in the global context? How many varieties of accents are tolerable in general? How can the speaker be helped to be understood regardless of his/her own accent? How this can be achieved through classroom activities or self-study? When the answers to these questions are more carefully elaborated in detail like in LFC, this part of the guideline can be evaluated as more practical and useful, and ultimately leading maritime English instructors to approach English pronunciation teaching in a more comprehensive and systematic manner.

Secondly, out of four major components suggested in the model course above, the latter three, such as connected speech, word stress, intonation and pitch have not been regarded as critical or necessary in terms of mutual intelligibility. Rather, some of these features, such as weak forms, stress-time rhythm and word stress, have been reported to be unhelpful, as they hinder listeners' understanding of others in a BELF communicative context, and should therefore be avoided. The linguistic features regarded as negative in cross-cultural communication but included in the model course are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 Negative linguistic features in cross-cultural communication

	Aspects of pronunciation	IMO Model Course	ELF targets	Influ. to intell.
1	Features of connected speech	To be taught	Inconsequential or unhelpful	Negative
2	Word stress	To be taught	Unnecessary/ can reduce flexibility	No
3	Intonation and pitch	To be taught	Nuero-linguistically inaccessible/ pedagogically unreachable/ possibly meaningless (Walker, 2011, p.39)	No

As shown above, the most of the pronunciation features suggested by IMO model course is something that the speakers in BELF environment refrain from adopting, since those are all directly connected to the negative sides of communication in terms of intelligibility. Walker(2010) emphasizes that the applying the features of connected speech such as schwa, assimilation, or coalescence, specifically at maintaining the rapid speech level like native speakers do decrease and even hamper the ELF intelligibility. This insistence seems to be quite contrary to the guideline made by IMO model course 3.17, which encourages the instructors to teach connected speech features to enhance learners' competencies in speaking:

Leaners often complain that they find native speakers difficult to understand because they speak too quickly. This statement often reflects the fact that students are not accustomed to listening to native speakers and that they have difficulty identifying word boundaries in connected speech.

Besides this, a large number of discrepancies between the two guidelines, or Lingua Franca Core and IMO Maritime English model course, still exists in other areas of teaching speaking such as word stress, intonation and pitch. Each element of these also needs to be closely analysed and compared in order to make a more effective and clearer

guideline.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

In this paper, in order to provide more practical guidelines for teaching speaking in Maritime English classes, the characteristics of BELF and its pronunciation guide, or LFC, have been closely examined, and compared with those of the updated Maritime English Model Course 3.17. These two systems share a common ground for teaching English in multi-cultural environments, and cater to a diversity of English-language users and their different origins. However, their practical approaches in terms of which elements should be taught to enhance competencies in speaking differ considerably: LFC reflects the practical considerations of ELF speakers in the global business community, and absolutely do not emphasize the means used by native speakers, while focusing on mutual intelligibility as the key of effective communication; IMO Model Course 3.17, on the other hand, largely focuses on traditional methods of teaching speaking by focusing on skills that mimic nativeness.

Keeping in mind that the current business environment in which English is used for communication is changing substantially, and the maritime industry is at the forefront of these changes considering the current and future supply of seafarers and their geographical distributions, it is time for us to actively consider the new theories and approaches that fully encompass these on-going phenomena and try to apply these theories and approaches in the future instruction of Maritime English and provision of related IMO guidelines. In order for us to take this step forward with a more solid theoretical background by reflecting the practical views of non-native English speakers on maritime communication, therefore, conduction of the following research should be further considered.

First of all, the key communicative features of Lingua Franca Core need to be thoroughly evaluated in the context of cross-cultural maritime communications with empirical language research based on the actual VHF communication. This linguistic analysis of authentic sea communications taking place between ships and onshore(e.g. VTS centres) enables identification of critical phonological factors enhancing and/or hampering intelligibility at sea. The actual findings from the research then need to be applied into the authentic maritime communication classes in various local

contexts in order to confirm its practicality, effectiveness, and efficiency in communication. This ultimately enables the theories of LFC to become a part of future updates of the IMO Maritime English Model Course 3.17. Not only for this, paralinguistic communicative features(e.g. a moderate speech rate, word groups, and pausing), which are also treated as critical elements for effective and clear communication by LFC, should be included in the scope of the research in order to form more comprehensive approaches in teaching speaking.

The updating of the future Maritime English Model Course 3.17 based on the application of new theory and research backed by authentic data is expected to contribute to the maritime English language teachers' and learners' realistic goal-setting, or speaking with a high level of intelligibility, and to help them to approach these goals in a more systematic and disciplined manner.

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