On Some Issues In The Standardisation of Maritime English – Pedagogical Implications

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Abstract: The paper deals with the nature of Maritime English its linguistic features on the lexical, syntactic, discourse and pragmatic level. Sociolinguistic features, particularly the status of the languages (national and English) used in international maritime communications, are studied. A survey has been made of the current Maritime English language standards used in voice communications at sea. The work focuses on the relation between the standard forms of communication in English as laid down in IMO Standards Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) and linguistic variation, i.e. the language forms actually used in everyday real situations at sea. These are then evaluated with respect to the objectives for learning and teaching Maritime English.

1. Introduction

Any native speaker of a language is normally aware of the fact that his language, as used either in spoken or written communication, changes and selects (at any time and in any place) the linguistic form most appropriate to a concrete speech situation. In this sense any use of a language is specific because, as Widdowson (1998:3) puts it, 'whenever I indulge in utterance, I fashion the form of my message according to communicative requirements'. The native speaker is normally unaware of the cognitive and psycholinguistic process lying underneath such a selection and adaptation. This however does not prevent him from understanding and generating all and only acceptable (i.e. grammatical) sentences of his language in any communicative situation.

A speaker may decide deliberately or can even be expected to use his language to act upon his linguistic environment, to 'do things with words', e.g. communications within the family, at work, in ship handling operations, bridge team management, in dealing with the passengers or public in crisis situations at sea or in port, etc.). Therefore he must possess an inventory of linguistic and interdisciplinary rules and procedures enabling him to select and apply (or avoid using) the right linguistic form in order to conduct his communicative intent.

Furthermore, any native speaker also knows that his selection may involve a minor or major divergence from, or convergence to, a linguistic form that is preferably neutral and functionally unmarked. The efficiency and success of his participation in communication will largely depend on the relationship between the inventory permanently stored in the speaker's linguistic and, more precisely, communicative competence, his assessment of the extra-linguistic factors affecting the communicative situation, the participant's expectations and mutual 'knowledge of the world' on the one hand, and his choice of the appropriate ('correct') linguistic means to best meet all the dimensions of discourse (communicative, pragmatic, and semiotic) on the other (cf. Mason 1990, Hatch 1992).

Linguistic and communicative competence facilitates the choice of the right linguistic expression (also by highlighting possible errors) and ensure the speaker an appropriate place and role in the linguistic community (e.g. in a muli-national and multi-cultural ship's crew), linking the linguistic norm as a generally accepted, i.e. 'standard' linguistic expression norm, with the instances or forms of language variation, which can be defined (according to Brown & Jule 1981) as elements of linguistic expression subjected to and imposed by the action of extralinguistic content and situational factors (field register), the speaker's role (tenor) and type /medium of communication (mode). Through higher frequency of occurrence and recurrent appearance in typical linguistic contexts and extralinguistic situations, these elements are first adopted by the professional groups

and later, in a natural process of normalisation, turn into norms, standards or even prescribed rul This lengthy passage from a usage-triggered variation to an adopted standard is usually encourag first by extensive use within a restricted linguistic community (social or professional group followed then by the process of education and training, and sometimes even enforced by vario kinds of sociolinguistic intervention such as language politics, institutional documents, conventio etc. (cf. Sager 1990).

For the purpose of this text we shall use the term *variation* in the sense of instance of use of:

a) a specific maritime linguistic feature (any linguistic unit at any level of linguis description), or
b) an instance of specific use of a linguistic unit from general English (EGP) in t maritime communication environment (i.e. maritime discourse: spoken communicatio written text etc.).

On the other hand, the term *variety* or *variant* will be used to represent Maritime English as specific type and subset of general English encompassing the linguistic description of all t variations taken as a systematic entity (Trenkner 1997, Pritchard 1998).

This paper therefore represents a survey of the standards and linguistic variations in usi English in maritime communications with inferences and suggestions for setting learning a teaching objectives for Maritime English courses.

2. Standard vs. variation in Maritime English

2.1 Following the considerations above, by merely naming a language 'Maritime English' (or Ara Croatian, French, Italian, etc.) we have tacitly classed any maritime language into a kind of language variety corresponding or parallel to e.g. dialects, sociolects etc. This, however, is n necessarily the case because, irrespective of:

(a) specificity of subject-matter or social function of the text (e.g. the objective of ship-to-sh VHF communications in avoiding collisions)
(b) specific relation and roles of individual participants in communication (i.e. differences professional rank or social status between the controlling station as the sender and respondi station as the receiver of the message) which requires appropriate linguistic forms shaping th discourse type, structure and vocabulary of the exchange: e.g. orders, advice, instruction recommendations, requests, questions, answers, information, etc. in marine communications.
(c) various media used as carriers of communication (VHF / MF radio, telex, fax, electronic mail)

any maritime language exhibits a number of systematic variations constituting a set of separat specific linguistic expressions which we call *'Maritime English'* (Pritchard 1997)[1] . Maritim English (or Croatian, French etc.) therefore represents predominantly a lexical and to some exte grammatical and pragmatic linguistic expression of the specific use or application of gener English.

In such a situation of open choice the speaker selects only those linguistic variations (o Maritime English) that are appropriate to the extralinguistic situation or context of situation, whil at the same time subjecting them to his own goals or communicative intent.

Maritime English represents a variety of English language (not a separate language), chose and adopted by the general maritime community and, occasionally, expressly recommended for us by seafarers, to achieve effective communication in everyday life on board, ship-to-ship and ship to-shore communication, and in performing other jobs and duties related to all aspects of maritim traffic and shipping (Trenkner 1997, Pritchard 1997).

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[1] The term Maritime English will be capitalised in this text upon suggestion made by Peter Trenkner at the 1997 Malmö WOME meeting to emphasise its importance in international maritime communications and its role in Maritime Education and Training)

English for maritime communications is a variety of maritime English still further limited in vocabulary and structure to suit specific requirements of interpersonal communication (always on discourse level) and interaction with similar goals as shown above. This variety of English is constrained by situational and contextual dimension (Crystal-Davy 1969, Bhatia 1993, Hatim-Mason 1990) such as subject-matter or domain (navigation, safety, shipping, maritime law, etc.), field (e.g. distress communications) mode (cf. spoken vs. written varieties; e.g. those to be read or uttered, transcripts of spoken text, etc.) and tenor or attitude (e.g. formal - informal, stiff - loose, polite - impolite, standard – colloquial styles in maritime discourse and communications).

2.2 **Standardisation** of the language of maritime safety communications and appropriate training in learning such standards constitute the basic prerequisites in order to ensure the highest possible degree of linguistic performance in actual communications and to reach the learning objectives in Maritime Education and Training (MET). Of course, the term *standard language* raises questions that sometimes may be difficult to answer. Does it belong to a set of potential realisations of a particular linguistic code, therefore being abstract in nature, or is it one of the realisation of such an abstract set of linguistic rules which operate on discrete units of vocabulary? It seems to be linguistically appropriate to claim that standard language fits the latter description, i.e. it represents just one realisations of a vast linguistic potential owned by the speaker in a given situation for a particular purpose. The speaker/seafarer has a choice, an inventory stored in his brain, of realisations that may be referred to as registers within his linguistic or communicative competence. It does not differ from any language variety, and represents in fact a variety itself, a standard variety. A variety becomes standard when one specific variety (say, a dialect, a social or professional dialect, etc.) or a "combination of features (lexical, grammatical and discourse) of various varieties is agreed upon or elevated by agreement or consent of some authority (group of people, society, nation, state, bodies of international speech community through rules, regulations and convention) to the degree of a set of linguistic forms prescribed or, in the case of maritime safety communications, recommended for use by particular speakers/users in specific situations" (Pritchard 1999). Thus we obtain national standard languages, the degree of obligation of their use depending mostly on such extra-linguistic elements as cultural, historic, political and other reasons.

For some 'specific languages', e.g. professional or social dialects) it is relatively easy to identify the participants in communication, their respective social roles, or the extralinguistic content of their communication and even the shared knowledge - in most cases these contexts, roles and contents are very restricted and require the linguistic expression in the form of accepted and normalised fixed formulas in the specific discourse. In the development of maritime English it has often been assumed that these specific linguistic features primarily exhibit the needs of the ship's crew as a special, very narrow social group (linguistic community). Consequently such a 'language' was frequently referred to as ship's or dockers' jargon, extended later to the term *seafaring English*, analogous to 'legalese', 'conferencese', doctors' jargon etc.. This view, however, neglects the more neutral, informative aspect of language use - the varieties of English called nautical/maritime English, legal English, technical English etc. serving not only the specific needs of the users in specific communicative situation but also of the specific use to which language is put in the various branches of science or fields of human activity.

2.3 The question of **the relationship between the linguistic norm / standard and linguistic variation** has a different significance and relevance in different maritime languages. This is the result of language typology (linguistic features of a particular language), differences in the historical development and unequal language policies. As a result, the relation between norm and variation is not considered an issue in the countries where English is used as a native language (UK, US, Australia etc.). However, when considering English as the 'lingua franca' of international maritime communication (with elements of either recommendation or even mandatory application), the question of standard vs. variation becomes an important issue on at least two grounds:

1. reliability of English as a language of communication for the purpose of safety navigation, and
2. problems of learning and teaching of maritime English for the purpose of safety navigation, protection of the marine environment, routine communications an exchange of information in the maritime field (i.e. study of needs analysis, syllabu design, curriculum, acquisition and teaching methodology, teacher-student rol materials development, etc.).

For example, in berthing or unberthing operations the language used in UK or US ports differ significantly from the IMO recommended standard as provided in SMCP 2001 (formerly SMN 1977/1985). This is evidenced in the terminology (terms for mooring lines: *head line / bow lin forward spring / forward backspring*) and speech act lexical units such as adjacent pairs (order response) in dialogues, e.g. line handling: *heave* vs. *cast* vs. *throw* vs. *send/send out* vs. *pass a lin cast off* vs. *let go; heave on, heave in, heave away, heave in* vs. *tighten, heave alongside; slac away, take the slack away, pick up the slack* etc.. It is quite normal that because of languag economy and for psycholinguistic reasons native speakers of English invariably cling to their ow linguistic habits and sea practices, unaware or poorly informed of the existence of internationa communicational standards. This may sometimes be embarrassing to the non-native officer or ratin when calling at a UK or US port because they have been (or should have been) trained to acquire different, International English norm - i.e. that adopted and recommended in the IMO SMCP. must be admitted that communication is somewhat facilitated by the lexicon of SMCP and genera maritime English being closer to the spoken standard in their phonological form, despite difference between British and American English (*buoy*: UK /b0/ vs. US /b*l/; *bow* UK /b□ vs /bæu), or loca dialects. This specific diglossia (i.e. the existence of two idioms/registers in the linguisti competence of a single speaker or speech community, one for the spoken and the other for th written idiom) is less pronounced in English than in some other languages used at sea, whereas i some other maritime languages (e.g. Italian, French, Croatian) the non-native seafarer is toda required to possess in his communicative competence and discursive inventory two or three idiom or registers:

1. IMO standard phrases (SMNV 1977, 1985; SMCP 1997, 2000, 2001)
2. A variety of the English language actually used in international maritime communications (note the clash between native and non-native variety of spoken maritime English)
3. varied features resulting from the diglossia in the native language of the non-native English speaker.

2.4 **Maritime vocabulary and terminology** can be regarded as a typical case. As any vocabulary used for specific purposes (cf. also Frey et al. 1978) the lexicon of maritime discourse (spoken and written) consists of four lexical layers (cf.:

(a) a limited number of typically maritime (nautical) terms restricted in use only to seafaring and navigation (about 7%), with isolated meanings and distribution
(b) a major presence of general English words (80%) used as terminological units in maritime-related texts and contexts,
(c) a very limited number of semi-lexical or semi-functional words (used for describing, inferring, implying, expressing cognitive processes in the maritime field: e.g. *state, make, think, consider, let; situation, place, time* etc.), and
(d) a limited number of general English discourse markers, connectives, clichés, formulaic expressions, prepositional phrases etc. predominantly and typically used the maritime discourse/text to ensure cohesion and coherence (*consequently; first, second, .. last, as a result of; Yes, Sir, over, understood, come in, go ahead, loud and clear, have a good voyage, etc.*).

A major problem, however, is the high polysemous and homonymic character of general English vocabulary used in textual or spoken maritime discourse, sometimes even including apparently

standardised maritime terms. Striking examples are words such as: nouns *line, casualty, dock, heading, course, shackle; shipping;* verbs *to berth, moor*; adjectives *clear, fast* and adjectival nouns *low, high*. Dealing with the semantic and pragmatic values and relations among the different units of lexical sets is a particular problem, cf. terms problems in disambiguating of the lexical items belonging to the semantic field of 'port structures': *berth, quay, wharf, dock, pier, jetty, mole, landing place*. Though there have attempts at normalising and standardising the meaning and use of these terms (on the definition of *normalising* and *standardisation* see Riggs 1989, Sager 1990) frequent usage and similar contextualisations have gradually smoothed or levelled off their semantic differences in everyday usage.[2] Moreover, the use in everyday maritime communication of the highly polysemous term *dock* in the same or similar contexts has extended its meaning thus adding yet another (near)synonym to the above lexical set. The need for specialisation has however at the same time contributed to the differentiation/normalisation of some of these words in multi-word lexical units (compounds, collocations, idioms, phrases, etc.): *oil jetty, T-jetty, dockyard, floating dock, on the docks*). The situation is further complicated by the extensive use today of the generic term *berth*.

2.5 **Ambiguity and homophony** (e.g. *go ahead* used as a turn-yielding signal rather than for physically going ahead of another ship or aircraft) is the worst enemy of safe an reliable communication because it causes misunderstandings not only on the lexical but also on sentence and discourse level. The following example of fatal misunderstanding has become widely known. In the book *Fatal Words* Cushing (1994) quotes a failure in communication leading to aircraft collision because of different syntactic and pragmatic readings (interpretation) of the phrase *at takeoff* in the dialogue below:

Plane: ... is now ready for takeoff and we are now waiting for our ATC clearance.
Tower: ... *you are cleared to the Papa Beacon, climb to and maintain flight level: nine zero, right turn after takeoff, proceed with heading four zero until ...*
Plane: Ah - roger, sir, we are cleared to the Papa Beacon, flight level nine zero until intercepting the three two five. We are now **at takeoff**.
Tower: *OK ... Stand by for takeoff, I will call you ...*

According to the author the phrase *at takeoff* was mistakenly taken for < waiting at the takeoff point> rather than <already on the takeoff roll>. In addition the author claims that in this case telling the pilot what to do *after takeoff* does not necessarily constitute giving the pilot permission *to take off*." (Cushing 1994:10). Similar misunderstandings may also occur in VTS communication on VHF. Though language misunderstanding has not been blamed as a direct cause of major marine accidents, the predominantly high incidence of human error in the principal causes of marine accidents calls for a closer study of the role of language (standard and real usage) in such situations. However, miscommunication or near-miscommunication deserve a more comprehensive linguistic analysis.

For further linguistic research therefore, three sources of studying standard vs. actual language communications, particularly those in accidents at sea, seem to be useful (provided copyright permits are obtained beforehand):

a) accident reports by MAIB and other agencies or authorities,
b) MARS (published by Seaways and Safety at Sea)[3],
c) recordings and transcripts from VTS/VTMIS services, coast stations, port controls, pilot stations etc.

The terms *quay* and *wharf* are usually defined as synonyms, i.e. <artificial shore structures parallel to the main waterway or to the shoreline used for accommodating ships and loading/discharge cargo or embarking/disembarking passengers> and so do the terms *pier* and *jetty*), whereas the terms *pier* and jetty are defined as synonyms for <artificial shore structures perpendicular or nearly perpendicular to the main waterway or to the shoreline used for accommodating ships and loading/discharge cargo or embarking/disembarking passengers>.

[3] also available on the internet web site of the Nautical Institute

Due to polysemy, a typical feature of vocabulary in general English, English maritime vocabulary and terminology is also polysemic. This is the consequence of a high proportion of general English words used as specific maritime terminological lexical units. In this respect English maritime terms do not meet the essential requirement for a term to be unireferential (Sager 1990, Scarpa 2001) as is the case in many Mediterranean languages). Furthermore, the differences in the use of terminology across various professional and social groups on board ship (uniform or multilingual crews) are smaller in the case where English is used as the idiom of maritime communication than is usually the case of some other languages.

As in any terminology, many Maritime English terms have gone through the process of innovative introduction, adaptation, adoption, fading and disappearance. Time, therefore, is the best criterion for evaluating professional, linguistic and social status of new terms. English maritime practice has never been in favour of institutional imposition of strict standards related to terminology. Riggs (1989) claims, for example, that "it is scarcely possible to impose terminological standards on reluctant users".

Therefore, to be successful, any terminology policy must take into account the following principles:

(1) spontaneous acceptance of a set of terms among professional peers (experts) using it followed by
(2) reaching consensus among experts as to their adoption, and bearing in mind that
(3) the same term cannot be applied (or prescribed) equally to any form of language use, any linguistic situation or to any linguistic community without any sociolinguistic and communicational implications.

The process of terminological standardisation includes (a) *regularising* (spontaneous agreement among users on the use of a single- or multi-word lexical unit as a term), (b) *normalisation* (hierarchic or taxonomic ordering, definition, reduction of homonymy and ambiguity, unification of concepts , cf. Scarpa 2002), (c) *standardising* ('users reach "public" agreement to adopt a given term', cf. Sager 1990), and finally (d) *harmonising* of terms (establishment of terminological norms to ensure conformity and compatibility of various languages to international norms). Standardisation of English maritime terminology has mostly gone through the process of regularisation, reflecting the traditional pragmatic approach to adopting new terms, first among the narrow speech community on board ships and in ports and shipyards and was later extended to professional groups in the shipping industry, maritime law, shipping technology, communications, etc. There were no institutions to officially recommend or impose (or prohibit) the use of particular terms as was the case in some European languages. However, there was a significant impact of respectable 'authorities' such as the Navy, the British Admiralty, and the sociolinguistic influence of hierarchic division of labour and duties on board naval and merchant ships. One should also not underestimate the role of early lexicographic works and publications in the standardisation of maritime terminology (Smyth'*s Sailor's Word-Book*, Bowditch *Practical Navigator*) as well as the maritime novels of 18th i 19th (cf. *Moby Dick, Mutiny on the Bounty, etc.*). The modern consultative authorities on standardisation of terminology and standardisation of maritime communication in English are the Nautical Institute, the Institute of Marine Engineers and The International Maritime Organization.

The English language of maritime communications has only partially gone through the process of standardisation though considerable efforts have been made on all the four steps of standardisation above. Normalisation is, of course, a constant process but it can be stated today that the general seafaring, nautical and marine engineering terminology, as well as basic voice communications in English have so far been almost completely regularised in the English-speaking world through tradition, frequent and wide-spread use. Partially, this particular type of Maritime English has also been normalised (e.g. definitions of terms in Collision Regulations, International Code of Signals and ITU radio regulations). Only basic nautical, a great deal of safety terms and phrases, as well as some communication procedures and message formats have reached the degree

of standardisation, principally by IMO. A limited number of maritime authorities has harmonised their own national terminology and navigation/maritime safety communication with the IMO recommended standards, e.g. in translations of SMCP phrases.

3. Restricted varieties of Maritime English as a language standard in international maritime communication - pedagogical implications

A considerable degree of standardisation of English for highly specific uses and purposes has however been achieved in the field of the so-called restricted languages (Strevens 1983, Strevens & Weeks 1985, Crystal 1987, Bhatia 1992, Novi 1999) such as PoliceSpeak, MeteoSpeak, SeaSpeak, AirSpeak 1995; SMNV 1977/1985, SPCP 1997/2001. These are aimed at ensuring safety of navigation, safety of life at sea and protection of the marine environment. The normalisation and standardisation is ensured by recommending (*SeaSpeak, AngloSea, SMNV/SMCP, Guidelines and Criteria for Ship Reporting Systems,* various VTS guides) and partly prescribing (STCW 1995, ITU and IMO Distress-Urgency-Safety procedures, special message formats MAREP, POSREP, POLREP) a limited number of basic terms, phrases and sentences, significant extracts/dialogues from discourse (question-response exchanges), speech acts expressed in the form of message markers (REQUEST, ADVICE, INFORMATION, WARNING, etc.), and message formats (initial distress message by radio or in electronic form, SITREP, MAREP, POSREP). To enable efficiency of communication with participants possessing minimum knowledge or competence in English and to make allowance for complex multi-lingual and multi-cultural situations on board and on shore, the syntax of SMCP is very simple (e.g. *your message understood, say again; you must keep radio silence; pilotage suspended until further notice; no berthing on arrival; heave up anchor and proceed,* etc.), though sometimes at the verge of ambiguity. For example: *What is damage*?, recommended in SMCP, is ambiguous and has two possible readings: 1. <Which part of the ship has been damaged?> or 2. <What is the extent of damage?>. Furthermore, the use of conditionals (18.1 The Conditionals "May", "Might", "Should" and "Could") including permissive *may* or prohibitive *may not* is rejected in SMCP as ambiguous. Instead, the collocation *have permission* or periphrastic *to be permitted to* (cf. examples in Kluijven 2000) is recommended. This however generates unusual sentences: cf. *Is it permitted to enter the port*? instead of the more natural *May I enter the fairway/port*?.

Another instance adding to the current confusion in the relation of *'standard'* vs. *'real'* communication as conducted at sea is the discrepancy of terms used in some of the most important institutionally agreed standards in maritime safety. This is the case for example in the still incomplete harmonisation of the terms as used in SMCP, COLREGS or ITU Code of Signals. SMCP recognises this by noting that:

> 'These phrases are not intended to supplant or contradict the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972 or special local rules or recommendations made by IMO concerning ships' routeing, neither are they intended to supersede the International Code of Signals, and when applied in ship's external communication this has to be done in strict compliance with the relevant radiotelephone procedures as set out in the ITU Radio Regulations. Furthermore, the SMCP, as a collection of individual phrases, should not be regarded as any kind of technical manual providing operational instructions.'

Thus the basic term *hampered vessel* is used in SMCP whereas the Collision Regulations 1972 (as amended) lay down the usage of the term *vessel restricted in her ability to manoeuvre (R.A.M.)*. The same holds for the term *vessel not under command*, for which in SMCP also (though infrequently) offers the term *disabled vessel*. Furthermore, normalisation followed by harmonisation and, finally, standardisation of IMO standardised vocabulary or phrases are still needed for terms such as: *casualty, heading, course,* the verbs *to berth, moor*, etc.

Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP), formerly *Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary* (SMNV), are IMO official labels for an extreme sub-division (variety) of

Maritime English, deliberately designed and more or less expressly recommended for use in maritime safety communications (Trenkner 1997). Under the STCW Convention, the ability to understand and use the SMCP is required as a minimum for the certification of officers in charge of a navigational watch on ships of 500 gross tonnage or above (Section A-II/1 of the STCW Code).

The Sub-Committee on Safety of Navigation - 46th session: 10-14 July 2000 approved the draft revised Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP); while the Sub-Committee on Radiocommunications and Search and Rescue (COMSAR) - 5th session: 11-15 December 2000 and Sub-Committee on Standards of Training and Watchkeeping - 32nd session: 22-26 January 2001 agreed a number of amendments to the draft revised Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP), prior to its submission to the Assembly. We shall therefore refer to the latest version of IMO phrases as SMCP 201.

It is in itself a 'restricted' language rather than 'vocabulary' (Svensen 1993: 32-4.) This is why IMO recently replaced it with a more appropriate term 'phrases' to indicate that it constitutes a restricted code, i.e. a language consisting of a pre-set number of unambiguous words with simple syntax to facilitate communication and avoid misunderstanding, prevailingly in emergency situations. Thus the 'vocabulary' and 'phrases' of the language of maritime communications have become a subject-matter of discourse analysis and it is this type of analysis that should prevail in the study of maritime communications in the future. This also involves the study of the language of maritime communications as a social and cultural mix, in particular the correlation between operational problems and social cohesion (Couper 1997). One should, however, not overemphasise the role of spoken communication in maritime safety today (distress, urgency, safety communications) as according to some authors the voice component of 'survival English for shipboard use' (Weeks 1997) is doomed to shrink in the years to come. Finally, equally interesting is the correlation of the linguistic form (English) in maritime communications and the semiotic means of communication, i.e. the study of circumstances under which participants in such communication are forced or inclined to resort to non-verbal communication such as sign language. In addition, Weeks (1997) emphasises the purpose which language competence is to fulfil in maritime communication.

Although created out of necessity for ensuring uni-referential, unambiguous, economic safe and reliable communication to the widest possible number of users, and though being in force for a lengthy period of time (e.g. SMNV - 1977), these restricted language standards are sometimes justly disputed (occasional lack of naturalness and user-friendliness) and are often (unjustly!) faced with reluctance or unwillingness of users. Another major problem with the IMO phrases is finding the best method of acquiring them through the process of learning and teaching/training.

It is obvious that learner-centred approach, and cognitive learning, with a great deal of interactive learning involving the use of modern teaching aids (tailor-made software, CD, audio video courses) will yield the best results. One must, however, emphasise here that IMO SMCP phrases are a set of decontextualised phrases which cannot be learnt by heart. Therefore they will have to be contextualised into a number of scripts and scenarios, mainly but not exclusively in dialogue form, to suit the principles of cognitive learning and to meet the requirements of discourse/dialogue analysis in modern language teaching (cf. Logie 2001).

To this end traditional approaches applied in the courses such as: *Wavelength* (Weeks 1981), *The SeaSpeak Manual* (Weeks et al 1985), *The Seafarers' Language Course* (1985), a series of courses by Trenkner et al. (1986-1990) and *Anglosea* courses (1991, 1994) could be combined with those applying a more recent training methodology and teaching aids (PC-based language learning) such as *Maritime English* and *Maritime Communications* (Marine Communications AB Sweden), ISF *Marlins* courses and tests on CD ROM, Marlins CD courses (*Study Pack 1, Pack 2* and tests, Videotel courses, *MarineSoft* (Germany) and Kluijven 2001 (the Netherlands). Following the most recent guidelines provided in the IMO Model Course 3.17 Maritime English (IMO 2000) these courses and manuals could be efficiently merged to produce a number of new topic-based training courses in maritime English communications with particular reference to SMCP (i.e. topic

distress, VTS operations and management, passenger/crowd management, bridge team management, port operations, handling hazardous cargo, etc.).

Language status and maritime communication standards

To complete the discussion of the issue of maritime communication standards, a brief survey will be made of the status of languages and restricted languages in international communications as dealt with in institutional texts (charters, conventions, rules, regulations, documents etc.). The language use is based on equality. Therefore to speak of a language in international institutional documents is to speak about the national identity. United Nations and IMO recognise three categories of language use: *national, official* and *working language*. In practical use priority is given to working languages: Arab, Chinese, English, French, Russian, Spanish (with prospects of possible extension of their number) but English language has established itself as a "lingua franca" in modern international communications at sea (Novi 1999). It finds exclusive use in spoken maritime communications in the matter of safety at sea and in some routine communications (notice of arrival/departure, pilot-master exchanges. International conventions and regulations, however, also recognise equal or alternative status to other or national languages of IMO member-states. Currently, national languages are granted equal status through such legal provisions on language use in various IMO documents as:

- language of the flag state
- language(s) of the flag state + English
- national language(s) - unless one of those is English or French
- national language + English (especially in STCW certificates of competence, some conventions, operational and maintenance manuals, training manuals etc.)
- language/languages which offers best and easiest communication among officers and crew members (if not English)
- communication must be ensured in plain language, possibly in English.

In Finland, for instance, English is the "primary, but not the only, language of VTS communication" (Hughes & Wihuri 2000). Finally, in some conventions (SOLAS) and regulations (COLREGS) the use of a single language (English) is laid down. The examples on the relative status of national and official languages only confirms the dichotomy between good intentions based on the principle of political correctness on the one hand and the real situation on the other. Equality of languages can be achieved in official texts of conventions and regulations, but this is almost impossible whenever unbiased communicational conditions are to be created for ensuring safety of life at sea. Therefore, English language has been given (by IMO) the role of the international language of maritime communications. This very fact, however, does not guarantee efficiency of communication (particularly not in safety-bound communications) because of the above dichotomy and due to occasional discrepancy or lack of harmonisation between the recommended standard and actual communications in applied in real life at sea.

As far as the language standards are concerned, in setting out learning and teaching objectives for the courses of Maritime English the teachers should not only meet the minimum requirements as laid down by STCW 1995 (cf. regulation II/4, paragraph 16) which provide for:

Adequate knowledge of the English language enabling the officer

- *to use the charts and other nautical publications,*
- *to understand meteorological information*
- *to understand messages concerning ship's safety and operation, and*
- *to express himself clearly in his communications with other ships and stations*

Ability to understand and use the IMO Standard Navigational Vocabulary as replaced by SMCP".

They should also carry out a thorough study of the needs analysis while at the same time examining methodological, socio-cultural, sociolinguistic, pragmatic and cognitive aspects of the language used at sea.

In creating the policy and laying down standards for learning Maritime English world-wide it is therefore necessary to start from the top, i.e. the widest and deepest knowledge or competence of English for maritime purposes, down to the needs at the lower steps on the scale of linguistic competence in English, i.e. those that F. Weeks (1997) calls:

- standard English (i.e. highest degree of competence in general English)
- 'standard English with 'belonging' English (standard/general English with some knowledge of Maritime English),
- maritime business English
- technical English
- standard communication phrases (IMO SMCP)
- communications English specifically for use over voice radio,
- 'survival English' for shipboard use (as tested by ICS)

The 1995 STCW Code is more explicit about the necessity for the mastery of some standards of Maritime English than was the case with STCW 1978. The basic requirements as to Maritime English are covered in the text of Part B, ANNEX 2 to RESOLUTION 2, of the SEAFARERS' TRAINING, CERTIFICATION AND WATCHKEEPING (STCW) CODE, (Recommended guidance regarding provisions of the 1978 STCW Convention, as amended), Attachment 2 to the Final act of the 1995 STCW Conference, where it is expressly stated as follows:

> *"Although not universal, by common practice English is rapidly becoming the standard language of communication for maritime safety purposes, partly as a result of the use of the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary, as replaced by the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases."*

This remark in the 1995 Code imposes a number of important consequences concerning the role of the standards of Maritime English:

1. It recognises SMNV/SMCP as 'the definite authority' on Maritime English standards,
2. It predominantly reduces the recommending and obliging power of SMNV/SMCP standards to the narrow field of the language to be used in communications for *maritime safety purposes*, though other non-safety communications in English (e.g. notification of arrival at a port) are also standardised,

However, in the Section quoted below the level of the required knowledge is, unfortunately (and perhaps unwillingly) downgraded to 'at least an elementary English vocabulary':

> *"Administrations should consider the benefits of ensuring that seafarers have an ability to use at least an elementary English vocabulary, with an emphasis on nautical terms and situations".*

This requirement is utterly unsatisfactory even if minimum communicative competence is to be achieved at the operational level for the purpose of 'Personal safety and social responsibilities of the GUIDANCE REGARDING EMERGENCY, OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY, MEDICAL CARE AND SURVIVAL FUNCTIONS (Section B-VI/I) or for 'survival English' as proposed by Weeks 1997. Consequently, such a provision cannot possibly meet the requirements of English language competence on the operational, not in the least at the management level.

To a certain extent the situation seems to be somewhat more promising because in Attachment 2 to the Final act of the 1995 STCW Conference, ANNEX 1 to RESOLUTION 2 of STCW CODE, PART A, *mandatory standards* regarding the knowledge of Maritime English have been expressly and unequivocally established for the first time as obligatory, not just as *recommendations*. This is why the STCW Code 1995 is to be considered as the vital and most promising document for the status and overall future of verbal communications (Maritime English) as an unavoidable constituent part of maritime safety. IMO *Guidelines and Criteria for Ship Reporting Systems* (VTS/MSC.43(64)/ are a good step forward in this respect.

5. Conclusion

The existing standards on Maritime English as laid down in the IMO Standard Marine Communications Phrases (2001), as well as those laid down in other current recommendations on

the use Maritime English, are of such a nature as to ensure efficient communication at sea (in combination with other factors of navigational safety),

In terms of both content and form, the current Maritime English standards, primarily those referring to safety-bound voice maritime radiocommunications, meet the basic requirements on user-friendliness and are appropriate to the users' needs in most situations at sea today. They are also structured so as to meet future requirements.

These standards have been subject to almost a century long period of development, permanent improvement and continuous upgrading, building first on the earliest ITU recommendations on radiocommunications, encompassing later the basic concepts and terminology of the Collision Regulations, and integrating finally the requirements of a number of IMO conventions and other documents laying down, mainly implicitly, and in the case of the 1995 STCW Convention also explicitly, the standards on the form and use of Maritime English for the safety of navigation.

As in the case of any standard, further improvements will be necessary to make those standards more natural (in their linguistic form) and user-friendly (in the method of access to an appropriate phrase, presentation and suitability to teaching). This also includes the necessity for a more accurate elaboration of the terminology (e.g. addition of terms and refinement of some definitions) in the Glossary.

A computerised version of SMCP on many websites, in the form of a textual database, is now accessible to all users (teachers, learners, watchkeeping officers on board, VTS or MRCC operators), which provides for easy retrieval and reference.

The study on the standards and recommendations has unequivocally proved that the 2001 IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) should be adopted for use by SAR authorities, VTS services, in GMDSS communications etc. It should be noted also that the SMCP and other Maritime English standards heavily build on the language standards and practices developed in numerous projects preceding and are now widely used in the process of training and certification of seafarers,

Above all, however, SMCP 2001 should be recommended for introduction into regular and specialised Maritime English courses in maritime education and training establishments. For this purpose the IMO Model Course 3.17 - Maritime English is a true asset to any teacher or course designer. Full attention should be drawn to the cognitive processes obtaining in the various situation at sea and make allowance for the same in developing teaching materials.

Although the recommended IMO vocabulary and phrases are now in force for more than twenty years, there is a presence of a specific diglossia in communicating at sea, i.e. IMO standards on the one hand and actual communications as conducted in real situations, which often differ very much from the standard, on the other. This particularly applies to procedures in making contact, lexical back-channel signals, making contact with the pilot or port control/VTS on arrival and departure from a port. The formal discourse markers recommended by IMO are usually avoided in every-day real communications as redundant and are substituted for shorter, more direct forms of communication thus making maritime exchange more natural, very much resembling every-day telephone conversations.

Since real communications sometimes considerably differ from the recommended standards in SMCP, further research should be undertaken into the nature of Maritime English with respect to the changing structure of speech communities on board (e.g. multi-cultural and multi-lingual crews) and on shore. This should include discourse analysis and the study of pragmatic values of maritime communication.

The work on further improvement of the standards of Maritime English to cover all aspects of maritime activities should continue, retaining however their basic role in ensuring unambiguous and effective communication for the purpose of safety of life and property at sea and marine environment protection. For this purpose legitimate recording of maritime communications and the study of post-accident transcripts will be required. The creation and permanent maintenance of an

on-line global computer-based maritime language database, under the auspices of IAMU, may b most useful.

Finally, a joint project involving Maritime English teachers and interested experts from IAM member-establishments in preparing a number of topic-based SMCP training courses wou certainly be a major contribution to maritime safety and the quality of Maritime Education ar Training.

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