SeaTALK AND SAFETY AT SEA

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According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) there are 85,000 working vessels (of over 100 gross tonnage) on the seas. The shipping industry is a key component of the global economy, carrying nearly 90% of world trade, and, as such, demands high standards of safety and security.

Not surprisingly accidents and incidents occur. On average, two ships are lost every week. It is well documented that over 80% of accidents are due to human error (IMO, 2012, Horner, 2014). Of this 80%, a remarkable 30% is caused by linguistic and/or communication mistakes (Ziarati, 2006, Trenkner, 2010).

In 1995, in an attempt to improve safety at sea, IMO officially adopted English as the working language on board and over the last few decades the specific competency of Maritime English has developed to the point that IMO Standards of training, certification and watchkeeping (STCW) now require seafarers to be able to communicate "effectively" in (Maritime) English. IMO provides guidance on the teaching of Maritime English through its Model Course 3.17. Recently, the International Maritime Lecturers Association (IMLA) completed a revision and update of the Model Course 3.17 to the latest industry and regulatory standards.

However, despite efforts to raise Maritime English standards, accidents, often caused solely or partly by communication failure, still take place, generating a threat to life, property and reputation. This could be prevented through global recognition of the need for a standard approach and assessment framework for Maritime English.

MET (Maritime education and training) institutions have embraced the need for

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improvement in the teaching and assessment of Maritime English and, working with other parties, have put time and effort into developing tools and solutions to enhance both methods and results. EU Projects such as MarTEL, MarTEL Plus, UniMET and SeaTALK , the most recent enterprise, are evidences of their efforts.

The SeaTALK project (www.seatalk.pro) is the latest initiative of the Marifuture Platform (www.marifuture.org) and aims to establish a standard approach to teaching and learning Maritime English through the creation of standard curriculum content, learning outcomes, assessment methods, scoring and credit systems, all delivered through an innovative online platform. For ease of reference, both language criteria and assessment descriptors are linked to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for languages). Moreover, SeaTALK is based on the EQF (European Qualification Framework) which allows for the mutual recognition of competences acquired through the establishment of a reference framework, uniform for all participating countries. SeaTALK also incorporates the ECVET (European Credit System for Vocational Educational Training) model, with the aim of facilitating seafarer mobility. ECVET is strongly based on learning outcomes and competences acquired via alternative learning methods.

Maritime English Competence Grids developed by the SeaTALK partners establish standards for seven ranks and functions of Seafarers including Deck and Engine Room, and ranging from Support to Management level. The grids also incorporate the recent function of Electro-Technical Officer. The objective of the grids is to map relevant occupational standards with Language Learning Outcomes, Language Performance Criteria and Knowledge and Skills.The achievement of each cadet/seafarer is ascertained through the Assessment Method,which provides cross-reference to CEFR. The purpose of the grids is detailed as follows:

- **Occupational Standards**

To allow cross-referencing and linking of the SeaTALK Maritime English language criteria to professional standards. This involves cross-reference to the CEFR and STCW requirements and is complemented by a qualitative survey aimed at validating the Occupational Standards selected.

- **Language Learning Outcomes**

Define what the learner is expected to achieve at the end of the training path, i.e. professional profiles are addressed using the ECVET system to identify the Maritime English requirements corresponding to the seafarer's function.

- **Language Performance Criteria**

To assess and evaluate the extent of achievement; to assess the Learning Outcomes acquired through the learning experience, whether formal, non-formal or informal.

- **Skills**

The ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems.

- **Knowledge**

Outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of study or work.

In order to further support Maritime English teachers, the SeaTALK partners have developed a free-to-use online database of Maritime English teaching resources. Each resource is linked to a specific Training Module and Learning Outcome so that teachers can be sure they are delivering the relevant materials for cadets / seafarers to achieve the Language Learning Outcomes and Occupational Standard sat the level required. Anyone in the Maritime English community can contribute teaching and learning materials to the platform and, by sharing with colleagues, thus enrich the scope of Maritime English. Visit www.seatalk.pro and watch the videos to find out more.

Once the SeaTALK training module has been delivered, the cadet/seafarer progresses to the corresponding MarTEL Test. There are 9 different MarTEL Tests, each designed to assess the Maritime English of a particular type and rank of seafarer from Cadets and Ratings through to Chief Engineers, Chief Mates and Captains. Once the MarTEL Test has been graded each cadet / seafarer receives a Personal Transcript detailing the level of competence achieved.

To help the community use the above SeaTALK approach the partners have produced a manual

which provides sample documents. These documents.

- Identify and recognise the different Maritime English language qualifications acquired through formal, informal and non-formal education;
- Apply the ECVET, EQF and CEFR systems to the professions and levels of seafarer identified;
- Provide an assessment method of formal, informal and non-formal ME competences;
- Provide an English Language competence grid for the professions and levels of seafarer identified.

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By extending the work of previous projects (MarTEL, MarTEL Plus, UniMET, SOS) it is hoped that this framework offering standardized curricula, content and assessment standards for Maritime English will be the first step in setting global standards and will lead to safer seas for all. However, creating accurate, reliable and relevant standards for Maritime English is an ongoing process which involves cooperation between academia, industry and regulators such as IMO. Despite innovative work and recent developments, the Maritime Industry still lags behind other industries, such as aviation, which require English for Specific Purpose (ESP) training and assessment. The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) was established in 1947 and since 2008 it has required trainee pilots in member states (native and non-native English speakers) to obtain a qualification in Aviation English before they can become an airplane pilot. To help member states implement ICAO standard practices and ensure quality, in 1999 ICAO established the Universal Oversight Audit Programme, which allows ICAO to carry out regular, mandatory, systematic and harmonised safety audits (http://www.icao.int/).

The IMO as the global governing body of the Maritime Industry has no equivalent authority or body. Although regional equivalents such as the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) play a part, it is primarily left to individual countries and institutions to deliver their own Maritime English training and assessment as long as they meet the IMO minimum standard of 'adequate' communication. This lack of an international standard, and lack of the authority and ability to enforce such a standard, explains the widespread variation in seafarer training and competencies that constitutes the root cause of communication failures and leads to fatal accidents.

With projects such as SeaTALK the community is taking steps to set standards in Maritime English, yet there are still variations between regions such as Europe, America, Asia and Africa. Until the global community forms a consensus, differences in ability will continue to pose a threat to safety on board. By providing the framework for standards of training and assessment, SeaTALK hopes to prompt maritime bodies to enforce such standards and make these a requirement with the aim of guaranteeing the quality of communication at sea, thus enhancing safety.

If you wish to learn more, or contribute to SeaTALK, visit www.seatalk.pro or contact us at: info@seatalk.pro.

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