



MARITIME TEST OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE – C4FF ARTICLE 2

MarTEL offers a new and innovative approach to the Maritime English Language testing of mariners across the European Union. Through an interactive online learning platform, MarTEL will create and test a set of accepted standards of Maritime English Language for merchant seafarers. The MarTEL Standards are currently being developed by a consortium of highly experienced European partners including several maritime Education and Training (MET) institutions.

The Project is funded by the European Union and promotes lifelong learning among adult European learners and supports the development of linguistic diversity and closer cohesion in Europe. MarTEL's main aim is to improve safety at sea, which justifies the Project's inclusion within the EU's Leonardo da Vinci Programme.

At first maritime English may not seem to be of great importance; however the issue takes on greater significance when one considers the fact that the 75% of seafarers presently employed aboard merchant ships or at work in most European Ports do not come from European Union countries and have been educated at institutions outside of the Union and are not fluent or some even able to speak English at all. Merchant shipping is an international industry and accurate and appropriate communication is vital. It is widely accepted that English is the language of the sea. Therefore a seafarer's ability to communicate to an acceptable standard of English is essential. Furthermore, the staggeringly high number of accidents being caused or in some way related to poor levels of maritime English language being used on board merchant vessels or in port was of increasing concern to seafarers, ship owners/operators and MET institutions. The problem acquired greater significance upon the publication of official International Maritime Organisation (IMO) statistics, stating clearly that 80% of accidents at sea are caused by human error and nearly half of which are attributed to communications failures.

There was also a distinct lack of standards for the certification of Maritime English at international, European and even national levels, other than the existing English language standards and maritime English course model including the IMO's SMCP (Standard Maritime Communication Phrases, 2001).

The MarTEL Standards are expected to be incorporated and accepted by a number of MET institutions and accreditation bodies across the European Union. The core aim of the project is a series of maritime English language standards at three different levels, which will then be tested via MarTEL online platform, these levels include:

- The **Preparation standards** will include tests at three levels of proficiency: Elementary, Intermediate and Upper Intermediate/Advanced in line with IMO Course Model 3.17 but the content would be based on active learning and on maritime terminology and usage, with little emphasis on grammar.
- The **Officer standards** will be based primarily on either Navigation (Deck) English or Marine Engineering English. These tests will focus on skill levels considered appropriate for a given type and rank of officer, with less prominence to grammar.

- The **Senior Officer standards** are aimed at the senior officers in charge of vessels over 3000 GRT. The standard will include a section on language requirements for these vessels. All standards for Officer and Senior Officer Levels will give differing levels of importance to different skills and proficiency requirements at various ranks and duties. For example, a Chief Engineer should be competent on reading and writing but a more moderate level of speaking may be tolerated.

MarTEL will save lives at sea. All too often an accident at sea leads to the deaths of seafarers. These are considered industrial accidents and are rarely reported in the international or even national press, and owing to the global nature of merchant shipping these deaths often go unnoticed by the wider world. MarTEL is expected to have indirect environmental impact. If safety standards are improved as a consequence of better communication skills it follows that greater safety at sea will lead to fewer environmental disasters like that of the oil tanker Prestige. In November 2002 the Liberian tanker, Prestige, broke up and sank with 77,000 tons of oil on board, just 120 miles off the Spanish coast. Soon after the first mayday call communication procedures broke down and the SMCP were abandoned, consequently the emergency situation was badly handled by the ship's crew. The resultant oil spill left thousands of fishermen out of work, and contaminated more than 100 beaches and caused untold damage to the environment which could have been avoided had proper communications been followed throughout.

Evaluation

To enhance MarTEL's potential each stage of the Project has followed a process of evaluation and phase testing of the standards and their accompanying online testing facility. The evaluation process included the assessment of the appropriateness (validity), currency and scope of the MarTEL Standards under controlled conditions with real cadets at a MET institution in Turkey, Poland and Finland. The findings were encouraging and showed the true extent of the MarTEL Project's potential in developing appropriate maritime English language standards.

MarTEL Standards are currently undergoing the final stages of development in preparation for its final testing and evaluation stage before being piloted in a number of selected European MET institutions.

It is expected that MarTEL will be ready for delivery by the end of the third quarter of 2009. Several refereed papers on MarTEL have been published (Ziarati, 2008 – IMLA 08, Albayrak, 2008 – IMLA 08, Ziarati et al, 2009 – Bridge 09) and a number are due for presentation and publications in major transnational and international conferences (IAMU, 09, IMLA 09, IMEC 09 and IMAM 09) in September and October 2009.

The MarTEL Standards are being transformed into internationally recognised qualifications. 2009 will therefore be an eventful year in introducing MarTEL and the expected improvements in safety at sea for European seafarers in the near future. For more information and regular up-dates on the MarTEL Project, please visit www.maritime-tests.org.