IMLA-IMEC 2014 Key developments in Maritime English (Part Two)

Interoduction

IMEC26 was organised by IMLA-IMEC and hosted at Terschelling, Holland between 6 - 11 July 2014. Many Papers were presented containing fresh viewpoints on three keys areas relating to Maritime English:

- o The Maritime English Definition /and the guidance provided
- o Maritime English Training, and new developments
- o Maritime English Testing,

This paper will look at the Papers presented at IMEC that fall into these three key areas in an attempt to promote renewed discussions and future collaborations for research and development to further improve the standards of Maritime English around the world.

The Maritime English Definition and the guidance provided

There were several papers presented at IMEC that fell into this category and they discussed topics ranging from how to define Maritime English, through to the latest work to update the IMO 3.1 Maritime English Model Course.

The definition of Maritime English has been set for with experts and specialists helping to refine it for the past 25 years 9approximatley). However it was argued at IMEC that the shipping world is changing, with more and more people being employed ashore, as well as a growing number of shipping business and administration jobs worldwide that the current definitions of Maritime English are too narrow and focused and doesn't cater to these new positions - and as such should we look to have a new definition of Maritime English for the modern shipping world?

As part of the Manilla amendments the definition of Maritime English was extended to include requirements for personnel on Cruise Ships to be able to communicate safety related issues either in English or in the language of the crew and passengers. What programmes are in place and Maritime Education Institutions to meet this new requirement?

Another paper explored the possibility of expanding the Maritime English definition to include requirements for updates to the basic VTS vocabulary / phrases. The current vocabulary is based on SMCP but the paper argues that there are gaps and these should be addresses.

One paper highlighted another aspect to consider when considering at the definition for Maritime English, and that is that becoming proficient in technical communication in English is only achieved after acquiring the knowledge in a native language, and converting that knowledge into English can be very dissimulate. And so, can either the technical English be simplified on board to make it easier to learn, or, is there a way to communicate in a technical environment without necessarily using too technical language?

While the above discussion points have to be resolved among Maritime Education Institutions the IMO is taking steps to revise the guidance it offers on content, Teaching and Assessment approaches for Maritime English as they are currently revising the 3.17 model course. The new Model course will be split into two sections with guidance on General Maritime English (GME) and Specific Maritime English (SME) in reaction to the Manilla STCW amendments. More updates will be available about the Model Course revisions in the coming months.

This division of Maritime English into General and Specific was also proposed in another paper in order to reflect the methodologies of courses of English for Specific Purposes.. The paper also proposed that Maritime English be approached with an eye to communication competence to reflect real life situations, and the duties of a seafarer.

Maritime English Training, and new developments

At the same time that the definition of Maritime English is being refined, the best teaching methods for Maritime English are also still being debated. One paper proposed that one of the main flaws in teaching (Maritime) English is that students often don't know the best methods to learn e.g. they think learning by memory is the key to learning a language. One way to show the importance of memory in learning (Maritime) English was highlighted in another paper which proposed the teaching method of developing drills based on "Language Patterns" to build competence in spoken (Maritime) English. Bur while memory is one skill needed to learn a language, it is not the only one for one paper asks how can memorising a vocabulary list or grammar patterns help you communicate is a free flowing conversation or emergency situation?

The SeaTALK survey identified other flaws in Maritime English teaching across Europe, and that is that while there is 'common content', and even with many institutions basing their teaching around the 3.17 IMO Model Course, there are no standard approaches to Maritime English Instruction and that there is also a lack of a common understanding of the term 'learning outcomes'. Without this common understanding, or a standard teaching approach how can we ensure that all seafarers receive a quality education in Maritime English?

There were several idea's proposed during IMEC about how to integrate new technologies, and new approaches and learning materials into Maritime English Teaching. One paper put forwarded the proposition of using MOOC's (Massively Online Open Courses) in order to support the actual teaching of Maritime English so that time spent in the classroom can be more effectible used for students to apply and practice their skills where their lecturer is present and can provide corrections. Is online learning appropriate for Teaching Maritime English? And how can it be integrated into the learning mix?

Another paper explored the possibility and value of multiple Maritime Education Institutions cooperating to use low-fi simulations in Maritime English Training. The methodology outlined was: each institutions teaching the students their Maritime English Courses and then the students from the different institutions would be placed in groups and be tasked to complete online bridge team simulations - in order to practice communicating in English with 'crew members ' from different nationalities. Is this one approach where online learning and International cooperation can benefit Maritime English Training, and could it be the way forward?

Another proposed Innovation in Maritime English Teaching is the use of English fiction literature as source materials as a way to engage students in the learning process. general English fiction would be used as a foundation to Introduce students to the English language, whilst specially chosen literature containing appropriate Maritime terms would be gradually introduced in order to familiarise students with basic

terminology. Whilst this is a novel approach can fiction literature truly replace the teaching of technical terms in English, or would it be a supplementary tool to improve general communication skills?

Some papers at IMEC emphasised the concept of intercultural aspects in teaching and learning Maritime English, especially as the vast majority of crews are made up of multiple nationalities. One paper argued that while the IMO guidelines and Maritime English training are useful they do not prevent problems of mutual misunderstanding and intercultural communication problems such as pronunciation and communication area's not covered by SMCP. Another paper pointed out that In a Case Study In Iran it had been proven that many lecturers were aware of, ad believed that, 'Intercultural Competence' was a necessary skill to be taught in order for students to be able to communicate effectively in multicultural environments. But how exactly can these values of intercultural communication be taught in a classroom where the majority of students are of a single nationality? Could solutions such as the low-fi simulation above be the answer? Or is this a skill set that is most effectively learnt not in a classroom, but during sea service?

The final discussion point relating the Maritime English Training that was raised at IMEC was the issue of training technical instructors in Maritime English. The paper pointed out that Maritime English is often treated as a separate subject taught by English Teachers - whereas the technical staff teach in their native language. The proposed Idea was to up-skills the Maritime English skills of the Technical lecturers so that they can teach, or supplement their teaching, using Maritime English terms and phrases and thus the learner is taught Maritime English concurrently with their technical skills and knowledge - the concept of "Language Immersion". Is this the long-term solution to the teaching of Maritime English? What are the practicalities of implementing this approach and how can it be monitored?

Maritime English Testing

As well as the ongoing discussions and refinements in the definition of Maritime English, and the best teaching methods there was also discussion regarding assessment methods. One paper discussed the issues surrounding multiple choice questions (MCQs) in judging technical competency. Many institutions use MCQs as part of the assessment process for awarding certificates of competency, however the findings of this paper demonstrate that issues arise when the MCQs are in English (as preferred by companies and regulators) and the students are not native English speakers. The issue is that providing the correct answers to MCQs requires a strong grasp of the English Language as well as Technical Knowledge, and so when a student receives a poor score how o you determine whether the issue was a lack of comprehension of the English, or deficient technical knowledge?

An Interesting study detailing the investigations behind, and recommendations for implementing practical oral assessments and teaching of Maritime English in the Republic of Korea, rather than paper based assessments. The implementation of oral assessments is designed to combat the current deficiencies identified in Korean officers speaking and listening skills in Maritime English which can bit be adequately tested through paper based assessments yet are vital communication skills needed at sea.

A further study was also presented demonstrating the practical outcome based assessment approach employed for Maritime English by the he Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific.

Conclusions

The SeaTALK project members are also working on a comprehensive Maritime English Course content. It is anticipated that their would will take into account IMLA's recent announcement in its latest newsletter that it

will be reviewing the IMO Maritime English Model Course (3.127) to ensure it is in line with the 2010 Manilla STCW amendments. The completed revision will be submitted to the IMO by the 24th October 2014 to the IMO Validation Panel for review.

It worth noting that the existing content of the 3.17 Model Course will be largely retained, with additional section added containing guidance on how the Knowledge, Understand and Proficiency statements contained in the Manila amendments can be used to enhance Maritime English Training Programmes.

As reported in the previous News MariFuture partners are working through the SeaTALK project to develop a comprehensive framework for the effective teaching, learning and assessment of Maritime English. The SeaTALK framework is being directly linked to the European Common Framework levels, the new ECVET Framework, as well as the IMO 3.17 Maritime English Model Course. With close links to numerous free online learning materials for Maritime English and the MarTEL Tests (www.martel.pro) the SeaTALK framework will be a holistic way for Maritime Education Institutions to embed Maritime English into their curriculum and ensure the highest standards.

Several of the SeaTALK/MariFuture partners are members of the IMLA-IMEC steering committee, as well as being members of the IMLA Working Group assigned to revise the 3.17 Model Course. As such these partners are expected to work to ensure not only the quality of the new Model Course and SeaTALK framework, but also ensure that the SeaTALK framework truly reflects and includes all aspects on the Model Course revisions.

SeaTALK is an exciting project which is expected to reduce accidents at see due to communication mishaps particularly linguistic mistakes. More information about the SeaTALK project can be found in the MariFuture progress reports and the project website: http://seatalk.pro/.