

Bridging the language gap

The poor standard of English spoken by some seafarers is said to be a significant factor in the human errors that lead to 80% of accidents at sea. Currently, no international or European standard for maritime English exists in the context of the IMO – something that concerns many in the industry, as **Jem Newton** reports

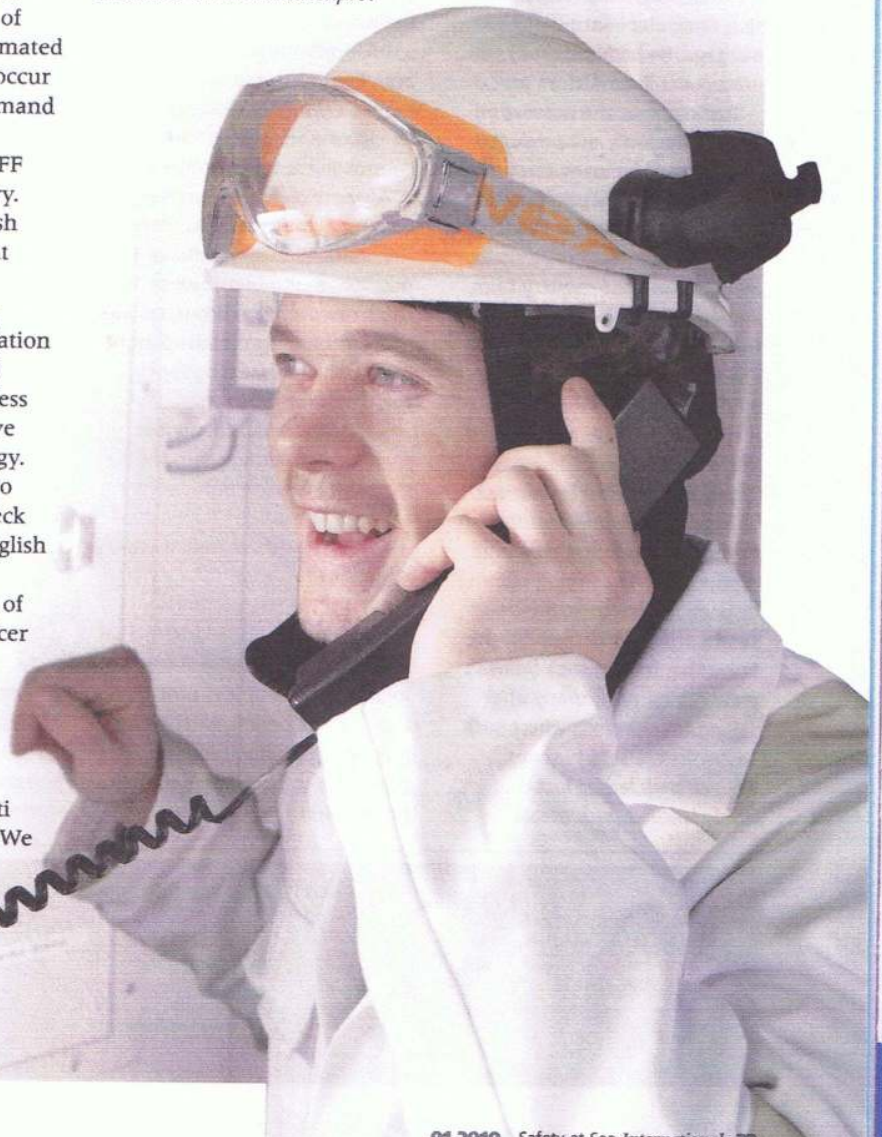
► **Since 2007, an EU-funded transnational project team** has been working on a programme to establish proper standards of maritime English. The team is drawn from UK-based Centre for Factories of the Future (C4FF) and Turkey's TUDEV Institute of Maritime Studies. C4FF and TUDEV – which had earlier formed a partnership called MarEdu to work together on major maritime education projects – are leading the EU project to set standards for English maritime tests. Called MarTEL, it is based on the premise that effective knowledge of English at sea and in ports is essential for all seafarers who have responsibility for the safety and security of their ship. Research suggests that an estimated one-third of maritime-related accidents occur primarily because of an insufficient command of maritime English.

Professor Reza Ziarati, chairman of C4FF and principal of TUDEV, took up the story. "We started by looking at practical English language needs on the ground." Different types of seafarer, Ziarati said, require a different set of English language skills at varying levels of competency. The foundation stage is aimed at young cadets who need to reach a certain level of English, with less emphasis on grammar and more on active speaking skills using maritime terminology. Stage two, officer standard, is divided into deck officers and engineering officers. Deck officers need a higher level of spoken English while engineers need to be particularly proficient in comprehension and writing of English. The upper standard – senior officer standard – is intended for captains, leading officers and chief engineers.

In each case, the courses are supported by teaching and online testing facilities that are undergoing pilot tests. C4FF director Dr Martin Ziarati (the son of Professor Ziarati) explained: "We are currently working with our Turkish, Finnish and Polish partners to assess the reliability and consistency

of the internet-based testing system." He added: "In the next few months, we want to expand those trials to other interested partners to ensure a uniform standard – it's very important that the standards are same for each test." At some point early this year, MarTEL will be ready for use across the board in both maritime institutions and shipping companies. "Companies are particularly interested in knowing how proficient their seafaring personnel are," Dr Ziarati revealed. ◀

Further information on the MarTEL project is available at www.martel.pro.



Standards of spoken English are essential for maritime safety
photo: Inmarsat]