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Whither Maritime English? – 2012

Abstract

In 2004, at IMEC 16 in Manila, the authors of this paper took up the question “Whither Maritime English?” which Captain Fred Weeks, a founding father of IMLA and the first chair of its Maritime English sub-committee, had asked at WOME 9 in 1997. Now 15 years later, it seems timely to address this question anew.

This paper has three parts. To appreciate the present, and anticipate the future, we need to have an understanding of the past. Thus Part One maps the history of Maritime English and revisits the predictions and recommendations of Weeks in 1997. Part Two, is an update, an account of what has actually happened over the last 15 years and includes the general trends, areas of interest and issues encountered. In particular, the impact of IMO’s influence is recognised, international research projects are commented upon, the application of new teaching methods is presented, the development of new materials are noted and the expansion of IMLA-IMEC is explained. Part Three looks to the future by once again seeking an answer to the question “Maritime English – What Course to Steer?” and critically examines whether present technological developments are capable of making human linguistic exchanges redundant. A road map for IMEC is presented with the intention of promoting enhanced standards of teaching and learning through the co-operative efforts of IMEC members while at the same time establishing a more comprehensive Maritime English framework. Further, the authors consider the professional profile of Maritime English instructors and the question whether a Quality Management System for Maritime English instruction is desirable, useful or even necessary.

INTRODUCTION

In his last presentation as an active member of IMLA, (WOME 9, Malmö, 1997), Captain Fred Weeks, a founding father of our Association and the first chair of its Maritime English sub-committee, asked the question “Whither Maritime English?” At the time he reflected on the role of the Maritime English Lecturer and his own experience as a young Apprentice.

A Maritime English Lecturer will always have in mind the well-being of his students, and, if he will admit it, the well-being of his own society. Part of that well-being is based on the concept that everyone should be educated to his maximum potential, so that, through his success, society will benefit. Training, however, as opposed to education, fits a person to do one job (that for which he gets paid) and not, necessarily, any other. Society wants educated persons, ship owners want trained officers and crew; and wants them to stay. Another consideration is that the ‘upper echelons’ of the maritime world must be provided with suitably educated persons. So the Maritime English Lecturer has yet another decision. Should he equip his students with the English language armoury that will enable him to prosper after what, in many cases, is a short sea career, or should he not? When I was a young

Apprentice, both my company and my Lecturers made the right choice, giving me both the training and the broad education which opened every door in the maritime hierarchy. Then it was up to me.

Capt. Fred Weeks (1997)

The authors of this paper, the current Chair and Vice Chair of what is now called the IMLA International Maritime English Conference (IMEC), pick up this thread anew, and as a result of the significant events that have occurred in the meantime, consider the impact of these developments and the challenges that lay ahead.

This paper has three parts. To appreciate the present, and anticipate the future, we need to have an understanding of the past. Thus Part One briefly maps the history of Maritime English and revisits the predictions and recommendations of Weeks in 1997. Part Two, is an update, an account of what has actually happened over the last 15 years and includes the general trends, areas of interest and issues encountered. In particular, the impact of IMO's influence is recognised, international research projects are commented upon, the application of new teaching methods is presented, the development of new materials are noted and the expansion of IMLA-IMEC is explained. Part Three looks to the future by once again seeking an answer to the question "Maritime English – *What Course to Steer?*" and critically examines whether present technological developments are capable of making human linguistic exchanges redundant. A road map for IMEC is presented with the intention of promoting enhanced standards of teaching and learning through the cooperative efforts of IMLA-IMEC members along with other interested parties, while at the same time establishing a more comprehensive Maritime English Framework. Further, the authors consider the professional profile of Maritime English instructors, and the question whether a Quality Management System for Maritime English instruction is desirable, useful or even necessary.

PART 1 – A brief history of Maritime English

It is estimated that at the end of the reign of Elizabeth I (1588) there were around 6 million native speakers of English, most living within the British Isles. By the time Elizabeth II acceded to the throne in 1952 this figure had increased to around 250 million of which four-fifths were living outside the British Isles, mostly in North America. These significant developments paved the way for English to evolve into its current position as *a*, maybe *the*, world language.

Today it is estimated that 328 million people use English as a first language, that around 375 million use it as a second language, and that in 112 countries, around 55% of the world total, it has official or special status (www.ethnologue.com latest update February 2009). Further, Crystal (2003) calculates that one in five of the world's population use English "competently" and that one in three are exposed to it daily. Clearly a major contributory factor in the spread of English throughout the world was through the military expansion and trading desires of the island nation, Great Britain, which involved traversing the globe by sea. Thus, where Britain ruled the waves, or at least the adjacent *terra firma*, crews and passengers would be deposited together with their cultural/linguistic, baggage. As the dominating partner, they would then expect the local inhabitants to communicate in English if they wished to do business with British vessels. As Weeks (1997) suggests, "this probably formed the basis of the pre-eminent usage of English language Bills of Lading and Charter Parties."¹

¹According to Seidhofer (2011) three out of four people who communicate in English today are non-native speakers.

For British seafarers on British ships their “Maritime English” was for specific, i.e. nautical purposes and consisted of knowing and understanding special terms, the use of which would identify them as belonging to the mariners “club”. Until only a few decades ago this would be much the same for seafarers from other countries who would largely serve on ‘own flag,’ and consequently monolingual vessels where the working language would be their own: Greek ship, Greek crew, Greek spoken; Russian ship, Russian crew, Russian spoken and so on. However, as Weeks (1997) observes, in the vast majority of ports of the 18th and 19th centuries English became the shore language and the non-native speaking mariner “would *have* to speak maritime business English to conduct the ship’s affairs”. Naturally, any crossing over of officers or crews to other nations’ vessels would usually require the acquisition of the new “club” language.

It is worth noting, however, that on board Imperial German men-of-war of the period, at a time when relationships with the British Royal Navy were far from congenial, amazingly English **was** the command language up until 1905, and was frequently the medium of understanding among German navy men on shipboard, too. The crews for on board service were not drafted from conscripts but recruited from volunteers of the German merchant marine where English had already widely been accepted as sort of working language. From the last quarter of the 19th century until the 1920s and 30s so-called mixed crews were anything else but isolated cases, and ship owners or senior officers simply expected their ratings and junior officers to have sufficient English language skills to enable them to properly do their work on board – in fact, an insufficient command of English was regarded as “bad seamanship.”

As for ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communications this was carried out using flags up until around 1900 when the development of wireless radio for navigation purposes was gradually introduced. Just like today, this technical development at once both facilitated communication and set new challenging parameters, not the least of which at a later stage involved oral and aural language skills.

It is worth noting at this point that at the turn of 19th to the 20th century English, while dominating in certain fields, was still only one of several important languages being used for communicating across borders. French, for example, was the language of diplomacy and, for the first three decades also the language of aviation. Indeed, the situation did not change much until after the Second World War, when as a result of the dramatic increase in British-American trade and commerce, supported and facilitated by their dominant military and merchant fleets, that together with American scientific/technological progress and the impact of American lifestyle/culture upon several post-war generations, the use of English internationally became consolidated, not only at sea and in the air, but also in many, maybe most, other walks of life.

At first this all had little effect on the teaching of Maritime English. As Weeks (1997) points out, “until about 1960 there was little if any need to teach the difficult linguistic skills necessary for ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore oral communication, because VHF was still a novelty.” In fact, in maritime academies where English was taught as a foreign language the (Maritime) English lecturer would “confidently base his lessons on *Standard English* with the additions of ‘belonging’ language and the language of the ship’s business,” (Weeks, 1997). However, as early as in the 1950s US vessels used VHF to prevent collisions, and in 1961 VHF was officially admitted for voice communication within port/VTS areas and as a consequence the development of Maritime English as we know it today was initiated.

At this stage, some four or so decades ago, it would still have been difficult to forecast the massive impact English would have on the maritime industry. While, as described above, history reveals that there were several indicators it may, in fact, be argued that six significant developments have since contributed to the domination of English, and consequently the evolution of the subject that today is called Maritime English (with a capital “M”!).

These are:

- flagging out
- cheap multinational labour
- rapid advances in user-friendly communication technology permitting a practically unrestricted and undisturbed voice communication to and from any point in the world
- the globalisation of the maritime industry and maritime training
- the fact that a *seafaring career* has now become a *maritime career* where the sea experience component consists of just 5-10 years, and
- the legal obligations in STCW and SOLAS that require Maritime English to be taught at MET institutions and to be used in shipboard, ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communications.

The result of these developments has been a dramatic and consistent widening of the field that the Maritime English lecturer is expected to cover. In this respect it is both remarkable and honourable that the founding fathers of the International Maritime Lecturers Association (IMLA), which had come into being at Plymouth (UK) in 1977, recognized what was afoot and held its first IMLA *Workshop On Maritime English* in Hamburg, Germany on the 11th and 12th of June 1981² under the guiding hand of its Chairman, the veritable Captain Fred Weeks himself³.

English had, in fact, been an examinable subject in European nautical colleges for many years, being among the first subjects taught and examined at navigation schools in European non-English speaking countries since the mid-19th century. However, as the first conference report from 31 years ago informs us “it is only since the formal adoption by IMCO (today’s IMO) of English as the international language of the sea, and the introduction of the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary (1978), that the lecturers have had the opportunity to meet each other.” The report goes on to say “many of the lecturers are graduates in English and well equipped to teach general English at various levels, but they have found themselves ill prepared for working to the technical idiom which the new emphasis demands.”

Thus, given that they rarely came from a seafaring background, it is important to remember the admirable concern that these pioneers of our Association had for the maritime context of their subject. Indeed, the 1980s was a productive decade as evidenced at the IMLA Maritime English Workshops of the time. Apart from the many creative and conscientious individual teachers who were preparing tailor-made materials for their classes, such international classics as Tim Blakey’s *Maritime English* (1983) and Fred Week’s *Wavelength* (1986) appeared along with a plethora of other specialised materials, often bound into books and used locally. Two major projects also got underway. At Plymouth, the *Seaspeak* project, led by Fred Weeks (WOME’s first Chairperson), was destined to have a major impact on global maritime communications, while in Canada, the *Anglo sea* project, directed by James Kelly (WOME’s second chairperson), used the rather new technology of video to enliven Maritime English acquisition. This project, an IMLA production, was initiated at WOME 3 held in La Spezia in 1985 and developed with input from the WOMEs that followed in 1987, 1989 and 1991.

At the beginning of the new decade there was considerable unrest in the world. The 1991 WOME, due to be held in Rijeka, was swiftly moved when the Croatian organisers pronounced that they could no longer

² 24 international meetings have been held to date in Hamburg, Germany, 1981; St. Malo, France, 1983; La Spezia, Italy, 1985; Plymouth, UK, 1987; Cadiz, Spain, 1989; Lisbon, Portugal, 1991; Amsterdam, Netherlands, 1993; Gdynia, Poland, 1995; Malmö, Sweden, 1997; Shanghai, China 1998, Rijeka, Croatia, 1999, Dalian, China 2000; Varna, Bulgaria, 2001; Qingdao, China 2002; St Petersburg 2003, Manila 2004, Marseille 2005, Rotterdam 2007, Shanghai 2008, Szczecin 2009, Alexandria 2010, Constanta 2011, Yangon 2012.

³ IMEC/WOME has had three Chairpersons: Fred Weeks (UK) 1981-1987, James Kelly (Canada) 1987-1992, Fred Weeks (UK) 1992-1995, Peter Trenkner (Germany) 1995-today.

guarantee the safety of the participants. Instead, the Workshop was moved to Lisbon, Portugal where the events surrounding the “Scandinavian Star” disaster, when communication deficiencies between the officers, crew and passengers had significantly contributed to the fatality rate, were very much in focus, and IMO eventually felt to take corresponding action.

It was this and similar events that brought home to the general public, through media attention, the simple failings and natural limitations or restrictions of individuals - the human element. Perhaps this is why, in 1993, that Peter Trenkner (WOME’s third chairman) was invited to chair another illustrious grouping at IMO to begin work on updating the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary. The result, the Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP), took seven years to complete. It, was eventually adopted in 2001, published in 2002, and its inclusion in STCW makes it a mandatory part of the MET curriculum in all of the current 156 ratifying States that represent 99.22% of world tonnage (as of 31 August 2012).

As the nineties progressed, the rapid development of technologies and the respective updates in requirements concerning safer shipping, along with the increasing number of multilingual and multicultural crews, imposed new criteria on communications at sea worldwide. At the same time the fact that a seafaring career was becoming more of a maritime career, where the sea experience component consists of just 5-10 years, was confounding the maritime educational and training systems in many countries. Perhaps this is why in 1997 Fred Weeks was so concerned about what to teach in class in the small number of teaching hours assigned to Maritime English⁴. Perhaps this is why he chided IMO for its failure to guide and establish a precise, common, attainable and professionally acceptable standard. Perhaps this is why he called for IMLA/WOME to “produce a really comprehensive, detailed minimum requirements syllabus for submission to IMO”. Let us thus see what has happened in the intervening years.

PART 2 – An update

In the 15 years that have passed since Captain Weeks asked the question “Whither Maritime English?” it may be argued that a flood of water has passed under the Maritime English bridge. During this period, Maritime English has attained the status of a “hot topic” where, mostly as a result of misdemeanours at sea causing loss of life, damage to property and environmental pollution, the legal requirements (i.e., STCW/SOLAS) regarding communicative competency have been considerably sharpened, especially by the 2010 Manila Amendments to the STCW, to specifically promote safety at sea and contribute to cleaner oceans. To further heighten attention, as noted above, the Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) were adopted in 2001 and published in 2002.

Apart from its role as a regulatory body, the IMO has reacted to Weeks criticism of its previous lack of practical guidance and technical assistance by producing the Maritime English Model Course 3.17⁵ (1999,

⁴ Weeks lists seven ESP choices: 1. Standard English; 2. Standard English with “Belonging” English; 3. Survival English for shipboard use; 4. Maritime business English; 5. Technical English; 6. Communication English, specifically for use over voice radio; 7. Standard communication phrases, as exemplified by the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases.

⁵ There are two sections in the model course for Maritime English: Core Sections 1 and 2, both of which contain a separate syllabus. This system allows trainees to enter the course at a point which suits their level of English. It is recommended that instructors carry out a pre-course appraisal in order to assess the existing language level of each trainee. The syllabus in Core Section 1 is designed for trainees who have an elementary or lower intermediate level of English while the syllabus in Core Section 2 is designed for trainees who have lower intermediate or intermediate level of English. The definitions of these language levels and the basic entry requirements for the trainee target groups are given in Part A of both sections of the course. Core Section 1 is intended to prepare trainees for entry to Core Section 2. However, it is possible for trainees to enter directly to Core Section 2 without following Core Section 1, provided that they can satisfy the entry requirements.

revised 2009), and the Maritime English Instructors Training Course (MEITC, 2002) which has, to date, been delivered by IMO consultants in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South and Central America. Moreover, as a result of Chinese concerns regarding the effectiveness of Maritime English teaching in its numerous MET institutions, the IMO provided for a team of experts to visit, examine and recommend improvements in 2001⁶. The authors applaud the Chinese initiative and IMO's support but wonder why, in the decade that has followed, such surveys have not materialised in other parts of the world where clearly they would be of great benefit in the effort to raise standards. Nonetheless, it was encouraging to see MEITC teacher training courses being delivered regularly for a while, although in recent years the funding has not been made available. The Maritime English Model Course 3.17 has met a broader acceptance compared to its predecessor 1.24 (1991).

From the European point of view, the first significant recent event in the field was the European Commission's 2-year research project entitled *The impact of multicultural and multilingual crews on maritime communication* (MARCOM, 1998). The MARCOM Project was concerned specifically with the problems and practices of Maritime English usage and the training procedures in use and as such its stated aim was to contribute to the enhancement of ship safety, environmental protection and stress-free social interaction. More specifically, its main objectives were:

- to provide an understanding of the significance of communication in the multicultural and linguistically diverse ships of today, and
- to provide English language instructors of Maritime English with detailed information on the nature of on board and ship-to-shore use and misuse of language and the types of accidents which can result.

MARCOM's 22 deliverables offered a unique body of information still relevant today whenever aspects of communication are being discussed. Sadly, acquiring copies of these from the Commission has been notoriously difficult.

MARCOM revealed that English language teachers at MET institutions often do not have sufficient subject knowledge to teach Maritime English with credibility. It therefore recommended that subject teachers and English teachers work in tandem to produce and deliver materials that would facilitate the teaching and learning of subjects in English. This, it suggested, would guarantee the vital element of credibility while ensuring that the quality of Maritime English teaching improves; an issue that has been hotly discussed at many a professional gathering since.

As a result, this "new" approach in methodology was presented in the European Commissions *The Thematic Network on Maritime Education, Training and Mobility of Seafarers* (2003) where, in a small corner (workpackage 7) Maritime English was represented. Here Content-Based Instruction⁷ (CBI) was introduced in the Communicative Language Teaching/Learning context via Maritime English back-up materials written to facilitate the teaching of the three extension/enrichment courses.

⁶ This IMO mission went under the title of *Technical Assistance for the implementation of STCW95 – upgrading and revision of the training programmes and syllabi in Maritime English*.

⁷ While many English language programmes at maritime education and training institutions have changed little over the years, seemingly content with the comfort and security of the status quo, the trend outside this niche area has been away from discrete-skills instruction and towards new approaches to meet the learners' content learning and communication skills needs. One such approach is referred to as content-based instruction. Although there is no single template for content-based instruction, content-based programmes uniformly use extended content as a foundation for curriculum development; in such settings, content is not selected solely and specifically for the purpose of language-skill instruction and practice. Thus, the content-based approach is particularly appropriate when the language learner has a need to prepare for the content-learning demands of a specific course of study. For this reason it is well suited to the requirements of many Maritime English programmes.

In this respect, it is reassuring to note that during the last fifteen years new methods in language teaching based on modern research into language acquisition are gradually making in-roads into Maritime English classes. One reason for this is undoubtedly the burning desire of many students, particularly in Asia, to equip themselves with a *lingua franca* that will see them good for lifetime career purposes. Indeed, as the percentage of seafarers in the shipping industry shrinks and the number of internationally employed shore-based personnel increases, Maritime English has become an essential career tool, permitting mobility, flexibility and competitiveness. Thus, demanding students require effective and efficient methods, and this along with the demands of the regulators, whose prime concern is the promotion of safety at sea and in ports, and of the industry at large is tending to force the arm of MET managers to at least be aware of the new requirements when considering the suitability of the qualifications of new staff to the job in hand – teaching Maritime English in the 21st century.

Nonetheless, teaching staff, however good they may be, will rarely blossom out if they work with poor materials or in isolation. In this respect, even though Maritime English is a niche market, there are still authors willing to write and publishers willing to print that Fred Weeks, who himself authored two renowned texts still found in use in various parts of the world⁸, would be proud of. Marlins Study Packs (1997, 1998) are good examples of this, particularly for self-study purposes. Three more recent examples are Peter van Kluijven's *The International Maritime English Language Programme* (4th edition 2009), Maria J. Carrasco Cabrera's *Maritime Technical English* (2010), especially useful for Spanish speaking learners, and Tony Grice's *English for the Maritime Industry* (2012). While they are in traditional book form, often with an accompanying CD, there is a trend today to concentrate on computer-only productions, something that was in its infancy fifteen years ago when video was still the dominating visual medium. Two such productions are Marine Soft's *Bridging the difference: marine language training in compliance with IMO Maritime English model course 3.17* (2004) and Cambridge University Press' *Safe sailing: SMCP training for seafarers*; while two others are the outcomes of the European Projects *MarEng* (2004-2007) and *MarEng PLUS* (2008-2010), and are especially appreciated not only for their quality but that they are free of charge. These and a host of other relevant materials are catalogued and reviewed in Boris Pritchard's *A survey of Maritime English teaching materials* (2003, updated at [IMLA-IMEC.com](http://imla-imec.com)) produced as a research project funded by the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU).

As for working in isolation, this is no longer necessary in a world of instantaneous communication. The launching of the IMLA-IMEC website⁹, having registered thousands of "hits" from many different countries to date, proves that there is a demand for a means to efficiently exchange information, views, methods and tools regarding the teaching of Maritime English. Where, in the past the only opportunity to maintain contact was at the biennial meetings of what was then called IMLA's Workshop on Maritime English (WOME), today it is possible to do this on a daily basis. As a result, in 2002 it was decided to change the name to the International Maritime English Conference (IMEC) to reflect a special interest group promoting cooperation and interaction among its members year round, and thus, by doing so come into line with the other IMLA sub-groups.

Furthermore, with the shift in crewing, shipping and trading patterns, IMLA had recognised already in 1998 that its Maritime English special interest group needed to embrace significant growth regions outside Europe. Thus, Asia was targeted and until 2009 IMECs alternated on an annual basis between the two continents before being held in Africa for the first time in 2010 (IMEC 22, Alexandria, Egypt).

⁸ *Wavelength* (1986) and *Seaspeak* (1988)

⁹ www.imla-imec.com The website includes articles and information on Maritime English, with links to "nautical" pages and other sites. There are also pages on engineering and grammar as well as presentations (VHF, SMCP + tests, weather, fuel system and grammar) that can be downloaded and saved.

Perhaps one might have expected a decrease in attendance at such gatherings due to their regularity and the ease of otherwise keeping in touch. However, it would appear that the IMEC website has stimulated interest and considerably facilitated the dissemination of information of upcoming events. Whereas IMLA's WOMEs in the days of Captain Weeks were relatively small, regional affairs, for better or for worse today's IMECs are major international events attracting as many as 100 participants and intensive scientific programmes and activities compressed into 3-4 full days.

Back in 1997 much of the above would have been difficult to envisage. Thus while it is no easy task to chart the road ahead in this paper there are certain signs that can make an attempt possible.

PART 3 – The course ahead

Among certain groups of technicians in the shipping industry, namely ships officers/engineers and VTS personnel, there is a belief, maybe wishful thinking, that technology will take over communication and widely replace the restricted and limited human being. Two examples briefly illustrate this.

The introduction of GMDSS in the 1990s, a revolutionary innovation, indeed, also regarding Maritime English communication processes, should have set these "optimists" right. However, almost all the officers and students who fail GMDSS examinations do so due to their substandard level in Maritime English and not because they do not know which key to hit, control to press, or frequency to select. They simply get trapped by a light-minded trustfulness in the do-all equipment and assume that the GMDSS will perform all their communications, failing to realise that Maritime English competency will be required to gain the benefits the GMDSS has been designed for. Moreover, it became apparent, that a more demanding level of Maritime English proficiency is required by the users of GMDSS since this system merely provides close to perfect technology and not the language to really benefit from it. Consequently, it is primarily the Maritime English lecturers' task and challenge to change this attitude through enlightenment and discovery.

In addition, the introduction and application of the Automatic Identification System (AIS) should not lead to premature conclusions, despite IALA (2002) arguing that "AIS is found to reduce VHF voice messages and improve safety thus minimising language problems and reducing the chances of misunderstanding messages from VTS centres and vice versa." While this system is of enormous help as long as standard information has to be given, such as name/identification, draft, size, position, course, change of heading, destination and similar data, it will reach its limitations if extraordinary situations, for example, cases of emergency or distress arise when conditions, situations or processes have to be precisely described, controlled and handled communicatively. AIS is, unlike RADAR, a so-called passive system, and its users have to rely on the input given by the sender. Here a considerable number of so-called "errors" usually occur and ships officers often complain about what they call the "data garbage" they have to deal with. This is why still today VTS Operators do not depend solely on the data transmitted, but prefer to rely regularly on the oral (English) back-up information received via VHF.

In short, the authors of this paper feel that internationally much brainwork will continue to be exerted on the development of communication technology to a very high level, while insufficient effort will be spent on improving the language communication proficiency of the people expected to handle such sophisticated equipment created to protect the crew, ship and environment and in the wider perspective the efficiency of the maritime industry. Furthermore, the authors feel that as long as human beings operate vessels and take them via the seas and oceans to their destinations, and this will be the case for the foreseeable future, the development of technology and of the respective faculties of the ships' officers should be paid equal

attention. Consequently, the authors applaud IMO in placing the human element at the centre of its activities, and appreciate the promise of the new Secretary-General of the Organization to intensify this policy.

Furthermore, the authors, having worked extensively in assessing current Maritime English teaching profiles have observed the sudden rise in interest and concern of maritime organisations as to how to accommodate the new demands imposed by recent technological, legal, commercial, etc. developments in general and by relevant IMO Conventions and Documents in particular. Maritime Education and Training institutions, often reluctant to recognise Maritime English on an equal footing to Navigation or Marine Engineering, or to dedicate more instruction hours in an already tight programme, have been keen to find more effective strategies. Often this is attempted by paying little or no attention to the amorphous global body of Maritime English instructors at their disposal. This body, in the experience of the authors, consists of a group of career specialists, a group of English language and literature graduates often employed to teach general English, a group of native English speaking persons who are often not qualified teachers, let alone experienced in maritime matters, and a group of former seafarers who are thought or claim to have a good command of the English language but who seldom have teaching qualifications, let alone qualifications to teach (Maritime) English and/or Teach in English (TIE)¹⁰. Especially the latter seems to be favoured by the management of a number of MET institutions who encourage or order these ex-seafarers to teach their technical subjects in English and at best leave the English lecturers to teach general English or simply believe that the English they get from former seafarers is sufficient. This policy involves at least two unacceptable consequences regarding Maritime English as a generally recognised academic subject of instruction and research.

Firstly, Maritime English as a highly specialised means of language communication and a branch of applied linguistics requires a permanent theoretical back-up to be provided through co-ordinated global research, assessment and evaluation in the fields of linguistics and methodology to keep this subject of instruction abreast with the technological, legal, organisational and other relevant developments or innovations in the shipping industry which, demands close co-operation with scientists in technical/technological areas.

Secondly, Maritime English as a subject of teaching requires lecturers be they native English speakers or not, to be highly qualified in the areas of language, methodology and applied linguistics and prepared to improve their skills, knowledge and communication proficiency and adopt them to the standards required by lifelong learning.

If these essential elements are not given due support and appropriate consideration in the future, Maritime English as a subject of instruction will wither swiftly and will no longer be able to contribute to the safety of navigation and the organisation of the international seaborne business. The aforesaid two basic requirements cannot, in all fairness, be expected to be met by former seafarers, but this does not mean they cannot play an important role in Maritime English instruction.

To highlight the point in this respect, the late President of IMLA, Prof.Dr.G. Zade (2002), argued:

...we do not only have to 'marinize' the English lecturers, we also have to 'anglize' the technical lecturers. If we only pursue the former – 'marinize' - then the Maritime English Lecturers will always be faced with the superior technical knowledge of their technical colleagues. If we only pursue the latter – 'anglize' – then we put the English lecturers out of business. The closer the two groups come

¹⁰ *Nowadays, more and more MET institutions in non-English speaking countries teach course modules and even complete courses in English as the tuition medium thus, among other things, promoting the exchange of students ("mobility") at an international level. This has been referred to as TIE (Teaching in English). In at least two cases known to the authors Professional Development train-the-trainer Courses have been run to enhance the English and presentation skills of teachers at MET institutions who are required to deliver courses in English.*

together through knowledge and experience, the closer they can be expected to work together. Both groups can help each other – and they should. Both should be each other’s temporary crutch and catalyst.

This approach, often called “twinning” should undoubtedly gather strength in the years to come. Again, this also implies that the position of Maritime English as a discipline equal in status to other subjects such as navigation and engineering should be recognised at all MET institutions and the constant need to justify a co-equal position, which only too frequently seems far away, ceases to be a burden for Maritime English lecturers. In this way it should be possible to recruit, educate and motivate general English teachers to become qualified Maritime English lecturers who can then look forward to a promising academic career.

Regarding the prospective development of Maritime English as a co-equal subject of instruction and research, specifically the following questions will need to be addressed in respect of future teaching profiles¹¹:

- What types of Maritime English instructors are currently employed at MET institutions? What is the usefulness and limitations of each type?
- What are the linguistic and methodical requirements of a “qualified” Maritime English instructor? How can these requirements be met?
- What is the minimum maritime background knowledge required? How can this be best acquired?
- What further qualification measures for Maritime English instructors in the maritime field and in language teaching/ acquisition methodology can be identified?
- Which professional organisation or affiliation would best assist Maritime English instructors in meeting the requirements of the amended STCW?
- Is there a suitable body to oversee developments and advise (IMLA/IMEC) on progress?
- Is a Quality Management System for Maritime English instruction desirable, useful or even necessary?

From the methodological point of view, the trend over the last decade or so has seen many language teachers moving away from the cognitive view of communicative teaching to a more social or socio-cognitive view which places greater emphasis on language use in authentic social contexts. Thus what we are seeing today are task-based, project-based and content-based communicative approaches, which seek to integrate learners in authentic environments while integrating the various skills of language learning and use, making greater inroads into Maritime English syllabi. An interesting repercussion of this trend has resulted in a perspective on technology and language learning, termed integrative CALL (Warschauer & Healey, 1998), a perspective which seeks to integrate the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing with technology in the language learning process. In such approaches, students learn to use a variety of technological tools as an on-going process of language learning and use on their laptops and other mobile devices. Further, when mixed with face-to-face classroom methods and other learning environments, a blended approach occurs where activities may be structured around access to online resources, communicating via social media and/or interaction with distance learners in other (class) rooms or other learning environments. Since language learning takes place when learners interact, (often incidentally), the blended learning approach would seem to provide a suitable vehicle for achieving the “effective communication” status that the amended STCW requires. Moreover, one could imagine that as the integrated uses of technology in daily life advance, it is important to embed them in the Maritime English training of future maritime personnel, both for the seagoing and shore-based career purposes of maritime academy graduates.

¹¹ These questions are addressed in the IAMU research project entitled *The Professional Profile of a Maritime English Instructor*

A remarkable waypoint on the course ahead was the revision of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, (STCW), 1978. After more than four years of intensive discussions and debates within IMO and on various other occasions the Manila Diplomatic Conference on the STCW Convention approved on 21 June, 2010 a number of significant amendments to the STCW 1978 (as previously revised in 1995) Convention which entered into force on 01 January, 2012.

The Maritime English community is presently considering carefully and in depth the corresponding new or amended requirements regarding Maritime English and maritime communication of which there are many. The sooner the greater demands on Maritime English instruction and research are identified, the better position lecturers and researchers will be in to satisfy the new provisions and thus the complex requirements of the maritime industry. This in turn will impact on the design of Maritime English courses, their curricula, the materials development and assessment tools to be used, and even the training of Maritime English teachers, many of whom may need to update their knowledge and skills.

The predecessor to the Manila Amendments (STCW 1978/95) set higher demands first of all on the nautical and technical fields. It gave, for example, special attention to realizing competency-oriented rather than purely knowledge-based MET and assessment (Trenkner, Cole, 2010) leaving, however, further room for improvement as far as Maritime English instruction for deck and engineer officers is concerned.

Regarding Maritime English it is interesting and gratifying to note that this important issue has played an ever growing part regarding the three successive versions of the Convention, i.e. STCW 1978 via STCW 1978, as amended in 1995, and culminating with the Manila Amendments of 2010.

At least one term of reference determined by IMO for the corresponding consideration was highly relevant for our subject: *Requirements for effective communication*. In this context the following amendment in particular entails far reaching advantages for Maritime English as a subject of instruction and research and its reputation as a comparatively newly established knowledge area. The corresponding extracts read:

Regulation I/14

1 Each Administration shall ... require every ... company to ensure that:...

.7 at all times on board ships there shall be effective oral communication in accordance with chapter V, regulation 14, paragraphs 3 and 4 of the SOLAS Convention (IMO, 2010)

There are at least two items in these tersely worded lines which, however, will have an immense impact on Maritime English as a subject of instruction and research.

Firstly, the modal verb "*shall*" as used in the regulation mentioned above postulates the highest degree of commitment in legal contexts, e.g. conventions, laws, decrees, regulations, provisions, etc., indicating orders or instructions. This means that the clientele to which this regulation applies has to meet the requirements set out as it is not a matter of discretion whether to do so or not. Consequently, Regulation I/14/.7 essentially strengthens the position of Maritime English lecturers and indeed the role of the subject as well.

Secondly, the reference to the SOLAS Convention of 2004 made above is of utmost importance for the future development of Maritime English, both for MET institutions and for the maritime industry and here especially for the complements of the active fleets and their shore based services such as Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) and allied emergency services. The SOLAS regulation referred to reads:

English shall be used on the bridge as the working language for bridge-to-bridge and bridge-to-shore safety communication as well as for communications on board between the pilot and bridge watchkeeping personnel (IMO, 2004).

Here again the modal verb "shall" is wisely used with the implication described above, and this regulation is entirely in line with our IMEC policy, providing a solid legal foundation both for our work in class and for our research. Furthermore, it does away with the occasionally advanced argument that IMO has avoided specifically naming English as the binding language of seafaring in its legal documents. As a result, this essential regulation is highly usable at MET institutions and elsewhere, whenever the legal authority of Maritime English, its teaching and its teachers come into question.

Moreover, the SOLAS regulation advises the use of the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) in the contexts outlined. This advice strengthens furthermore the part the SMCP plays in maritime communication and thus in promoting safety at sea and in ports.

Although the outcome of the Manila Conference is not the optimum, it is, however, an acceptable common denominator and practicable instrument suited to further develop Maritime English as an essential but relatively new knowledge area in order to satisfy the new provisions and thus the complex requirements of the maritime industry in the foreseeable future. Indeed, there are more than a hundred rules, regulations, provisions, etc., in the STCW 2010 amendments and SOLAS as revised, which tacitly require a sound command in Maritime English otherwise these requirements, will not be met. These are a mandatory component of all future MET planning and thus must never be neglected.

Considering the aforesaid it should be kept in mind that any Maritime English road-map or sailing plan should allow for deviations and creativity, and for the latitude to adapt to the circumstances and conditions prevailing in individual countries and/or MET institutions or systems.

Curricula of Maritime English courses, teaching materials and assessment tools are presently being adapted, updated or newly developed in order to embrace the new or amended requirements set out in the Convention. Appropriate methods are being applied as discussed and promoted at our conferences as, for example, content-based teaching/learning based on a communicative approach. Furthermore, Maritime English lecturers need also to become qualified to enable them to meet the demands set out (Cole, Pritchard, Trenkner, 2005) thus highlighting the need for certification through teacher training courses.

As mentioned above, the question may be asked whether a Quality Management System (QMS) for Maritime English instruction is desirable, useful or even necessary. The general purpose of operating a QMS system is, that the MET objectives shall be achieved based on the requirements of STCW 2010, SOLAS as revised and other relevant legal documents. The corresponding audits at MET institutions include, as a rule, Maritime English as a subject of instruction. At random, classes in progress are observed by the auditor, who is normally not a qualified Maritime English instructor and her/his impression of the instructor's and students' classroom activities is laid down in a corresponding form which does not differ from those used for nautical/technical subjects. The Maritime English/communicative competence of the students, progress made etc. are not subjected to the auditing. At the end of the semester the Maritime English lecturer has to sign a document stating that s/he has met the requirements as laid down in the QMS Manual and that will suffice for re-certification. This leaves the impression that "QS certification is sometimes more important ... than the actual quality of MET" (Loginovsky et al., 2005), which in the case of Maritime English is totally unsatisfactory. Thus, Maritime English/communication needs a QMS system which

- defines in detail the corresponding requirements set out in the STCW 2010 and SOLAS

- refers to appropriate methods to realise the requirements mentioned above
- offers a practicable assessment tool, and
- provides a professional profile for Maritime English instructors.

The authors are aware, that such a system may hardly get a chance to be implemented on a legally binding international basis. However, within IMLA-IMEC an in-depth discussion could be stimulated whether the development of “IMEC internal” quality management guidelines is worth considering.

Last but not least, an appropriate assessment tool has to be developed and a standard yardstick adopted (Cole, C.W., Trenkner, P., 2009) in order to make an instrument available to MET institutions and the industry suited to reliably assess and measure the communication performance of students and/or officers. In this respect, one looks forward to the outcome of the European projects *MarTel* and *MarTelPlus* (2009-2012), which are designed to standardise the testing of Maritime English language proficiency through an interactive platform, as well as the proposed *SeaTalk* project (2012-2015) designed to create a qualification framework for effective communication at sea. Assessment is a challenging task but necessary not only to satisfy the new provisions but also to simply benefit our students by ensuring their safety in the fleets they serve and the safety of shipping in general.

As for any *long-term* map to show the way ahead for Maritime English as a subject of instruction and research, this is bound to be influenced by global developments in geo-politics, commerce and technology that may fundamentally affect the status of the English language in general. Questions such as:

- What will the role of English be in the world in 20 years, 50 years, at the end of the century?
- How will languages be learned and taught?
- Will technology preclude the need to learn other languages at all?

...leave us much to ponder over in the future.

CONCLUSION

Whither Maritime English? Fred Weeks question is as relevant today as it was before. The difference is that his future is now our past and while the issues he raised have been largely addressed, new issues have since emerged. This paper has attempted in a modest way to anticipate the future by appreciating the present and understanding the past.

Are we then on the right course? This will be left for the Maritime English commentators of the future to decide. What we in the profession today must be aware of and anticipate are the changes that can affect the subject we teach and continue to strive to find ways to influence these changes constructively, particularly in the role we play as mentors. In doing this IMLA’s International Maritime English Conference is in a strong position to continue playing a leading role.

Finally, a somewhat disheartening quotation for all those who have struggled in vain to master the English language but perhaps one to use to convince managers who fail to observe the stress laid on communication and English language skills in STCW 2010.

English has become a lingua franca to the point that any literate person is in a very real sense deprived if he does not know English. Poverty, famine, and disease are instantly recognized as the cruellest and least excusable forms of deprivation. Linguistic deprivation is a less easily noticed condition, but nevertheless of great significance. (Burchfield 1985)

To answer the question “Whither Maritime English?” for the time being, we may state that our vessel is on the right course. However, important waypoints have still to be set by careful voyage planning.

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