

# Practical Communication Approach in Maritime English

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper is based on the PraC-MARENG project research and it aims to present the research outputs during the project implementation. The paper focuses on the results of the questionnaire analysis targeting to identify the causes of common communication problems on board in order to identify the best practices in using Maritime English. It contains a set of questions addressed to the seafarers in various ranks. In parallel, accidents caused by communication failures were selected and studied in each partner country (France, Turkey, Romania, Lithuania, and Slovenia).

The partnership within PraC-MARENG will develop an online course for seafarers at various levels in order to provide practical and communication based learning and assessment materials taking into account the real conversations and accidents contributed by communication failures. The project will design a practical learning and assessment tool that provides the user with a genuine certificate for the newly acquired skills. This will be presented in a programme having a tailor made course. The learning will be organized on different phases (elementary to intermediate) to train seafarers working on different levels of command.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

There is a number of maritime accidents partly caused by repetitive communication failures which led to loss of lives, goods and properties. Maritime transportation is considered to be one of the most vital and dangerous sectors of world economy; therefore, the safety of seafarers, cargoes and vessels are of utmost priority for the shipping industry. Seafarers are expected to undergo the Maritime English learning phase and for this purpose, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a recognised approach in meeting the needs of global industry whereas English language is accepted as a common communication language in the maritime industry [4].

To research the underlying reasons in the lack of training of the maritime staff and present a viable

training solution, PraC-MARENG consortium conducted a questionnaire meant to identify the causes of common communication accidents on board as well as to identify the best practices in learning Maritime English used on board [3]. It contained a set of questions addressed to the seafarers in various ranks. The questionnaire focused on looking at the view of the target groups on the deficiencies in communicative skills of seafarers as well as to identify problem areas in the maritime context. The report was produced based on the outcome of the questionnaire results, and it will be used as a base for the development of the SMCP Based Maritime English Learning Platform. This questionnaire was sent to all related target groups and 120 responses were received. In parallel, each partner reviewed the method of delivery used by different education and training systems in the Maritime English context and

looked into accidents and incidents related to communication failures in their country.

The respondents generally speak their native language or additional languages, usually from neighbour countries, besides English, which is the language of the sea. Although some countries would like to use or promote their national language, which is normal, PraC-MARENG project will promote and emphasise the importance of English as the language of the sea.

The countries of origin of the respondents were Romania, Turkey, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, and The Netherlands. The languages spoken are: Romanian, Turkish, Lithuanian, Russian, Macedonian, Polish, and Dutch.

## 2 MARITIME ENGLISH TRAINING

Maritime English teaching and learning practices differ from country to country when looking at the investigations of PraC-MARENG consortium in partner countries [3]. Maritime Education and Training in the language competency of maritime employees is likely to vary considerably from region to region in Europe and worldwide; therefore, due to this variation, careful consideration has to be given to achieve the competencies stated in the STCW Conventions and Codes [2].

The PraC-MARNEG questionnaire respondents included maritime professionals with both navigational and engineering skills as well as students who have undergone some sea service.

Have you received Maritime English training? The first question was clear enough and the results pointed that 90 percent of participants did receive Maritime English training. Teaching and learning Maritime English are reported to be unregulated across Europe and worldwide although recent module courses and some initiatives have been introduced in order to fill the gap. One example for this is that it is quite unclear for some education centres whether Maritime English is “English proficiency in maritime context” or “Maritime proficiency in English context” even though 90 percent of the respondents stated that they received Maritime English training in one way or another [5].

Q7) Have you received Maritime English training?  
120 responses

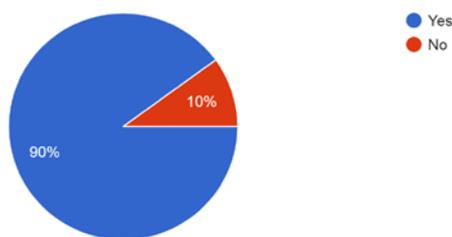


Figure 1. Maritime English Training

Which are the operations for which communication becomes an issue? The respondents believed that communication becomes an issue in the following operations from the most to the least significant ones: Ship-to-ship communications (71.7%), Ship-to-shore communications (63.3%), Safety and security (51.7%), Cargo operations (50%), Anchoring/mooring operations (45.8%), Emergencies on board (44.2%), Drills (43.3%), Watch keeping (35.8%), Daily and social routines (34.2%), Briefings (33.3%). The PraC-MARENG consortium will consider the views of seafarers based on their real experience and therefore it will give priority to the above operations while matching them with their relevance to their ranks and day-to-day operations.



Figure 2. Communication issues in Ship Operations (2020)

Which are the learning Materials used to study Maritime English? The respondents were questioned with regards to the learning materials they go through to learn Maritime English, and they indicated that they used Internet/media courses by 72.5%, Books by 69.2%, Mobile applications by 42.5% and Standard Marine Communication Phrases by 35.8%. Although it is a minor percent, respondents also used materials from College courses, University/nautical college lectures, during work interactions. This indicates that traditional books still play a significant part in the learning process. Integration of such books to internet/media based courses would enable seafarers to access them anywhere/anytime as internet based applications are on the rise as learning materials.

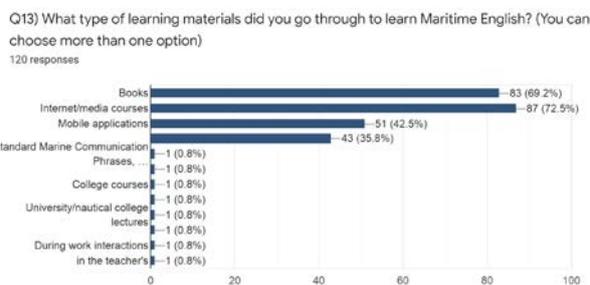


Figure 3. Learning Materials

How was Maritime English Competence assessed? The results indicate that the competence of seafarers in Maritime English is assessed by classroom methods developed by the teacher/institution (90.8%) whereas some is assessed externally (32.5%) and through international exams (38.3%). It is understood that some of them had to pass classroom and external evaluations at the same time, with an additional

international exam. This is due to the fact that there are different international standards such as the IMO Module Courses, STCW and SMCP phrases. However every country has national rules and regulations to observe regarding Maritime English learning, teaching, assessment and certification [1].

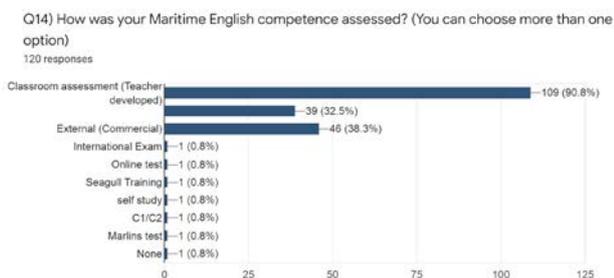


Figure 4. Maritime English Assessment

### 3 TAILOR-MADE APPROACHES

There are three internationally accepted publications where Maritime English standards are established: The STCW Convention provides the essential contents of Maritime English instruction for navigational and marine engineering students along with the Standard Maritime Communication Phrases (SMCP) and the IMO Module Course 3.17. They are not fully intended to present instructors/education centres with a definite teaching package to be followed blindly. The knowledge, skills and competence of the instructors are the key components in the transfer of knowledge and skills to those being trained through these publication.

In the survey conducted by PraC-MARENG work programme, participants by 95.8 percent wished to have Maritime English training related to their rank and specific operations. This is particularly important in the eyes of PraC-MARENG partnership as some existing attempts that are used in the delivery of Maritime English courses to various ranks do not reflect their real conversations on board and they are not relevant in terms of content and levels. An attempt to make the content relevant to each particular sea staff serving at sea would motivate their learning process hence improve their communication skills that will ultimately help reduce repetitive accidents/incidents that occur due to communication failures. Communication plays a significant role in safe operations hence an attempt to address the existing gap will create safer, cleaner and more profitable maritime activities.

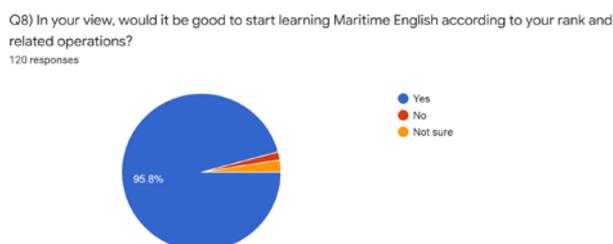


Figure 5. Maritime English Training Approach

### 4 ACCIDENTS CONTRIBUTED BY COMMUNICATION ERRORS

The accidents/incidents are reportedly occurring with the contribution of communicative incapacity of seafarers. The database research conducted within PraC-MARENG partnership indicated that there is still a number of accidents/incidents taking place due to miscommunication in partner countries hence potentially in Europe and other parts of the world that are connected by seas. These reports were filtered and studied in depth to be transformed into real time scenarios that the learners can study using the online platform.

Here are some examples studied and each was contributed by poor communication practices either by the ship's crew, pilot or external parties.

Table 1. Accidents caused by poor communication

Accident name	Reason for the Accident
Sarah F + Rusen Mete	Poor Communication on VHF between ships led to collision between a vessel at anchor and a vessel passing by.
Genk R	Poor English language command between vessels led to injuries of crew members during cargo operation.
Matilde A + Varkan Akdeniz	Poor communication practices between Pilots led to collision while navigating off the port.
MOMO vs SNSM	Lack of communication and understanding between Helicopter and Ship during a man overboard operation.
Ocean Crown	No effective communication between the Master and the Port Authority led to ship entering to shallow waters.
Slovenia	Lack of good communication between the bridge and the crew on mooring positions led to injuries.
M/V Vitaspirit	Poor communication between crew leading to a collision and major damage to ship structure.

### 5 CONCLUSION

The results of the survey were limited to partner countries therefore they reflect the data collected accordingly. Partners decided to keep the survey active to collect further data from partner countries and other parts of the world.

It has to be also noted that the majority of respondents are from the deck department therefore conclusions and analysis are made accordingly. It is particularly important that some responses such as the ones related to the areas that they are struggling with in communicating or failing to do so were considered as priorities.

Almost all of the respondents benefited from Maritime English training and those who haven't are potentially coming from old schools or else. This will also be investigated further while building the blocks of the proposed course.

Participants by 95.8 percent wished to have Maritime English training related to their duties and respective operations. This is particularly important in the eyes of PraC-MARENG partnership as some existing content that is used in the delivery of

Maritime English courses to various ranks do not fully reflect their real time conversations on board. An attempt to make the content relevant to each particular position serving at sea would motivate their learning process hence improve their communication skills that will ultimately help reduce repetitive accidents /incidents that occur due to communication failures. Communication plays a significant role in safe operations hence an attempt to address the existing gap will create safer, cleaner and more profitable seas.

The on-field reality proves the undeniable knowhow of Seaspeak and standard marine communication phrases; yet the lack of practical knowledge thereof has conspicuous consequences on the part of seafaring personnel involved in communication onboard. Thus, the questionnaire analysis brought out this reality and set out a needs-tailored approach to the problem of Maritime English. The four skills involved in learning a foreign language have to be addressed when teaching English for Special Purposes as in the case of Maritime English. The inclusion of real-life scenarios in the classroom or online is of the utmost importance as it makes the vital connection between theory and practice and instils a sense of familiarity on the part of the student.

It is undeniable that learning words and phrases by rote without practicing them in context leads to a mechanical memorization of the maritime lexis. Therefore, the questionnaire analysis laid emphasis on this aspect as well as on the need for availability of resources (online or traditional learning resources). For instance, the development of a platform accessible on a mobile app (focused on listening and pronunciation) which does not require internet connection would definitely help the process.

It should be noted, as put forward by the questionnaire analysis, that teaching and learning Maritime English has an irregular occurrence and follows an irregular pattern. As a result, occurrences where poor or misunderstood statements trigger accidents or incidents on board are a natural consequence and should definitely be amended. The alternative solutions include the setup of an online platform with topics related to the maritime environment with real-life audio sequences and footages.

The research undergone so far within PraC-MARENG partnership demonstrated that there is a need for improvement of the learning database for people working in the maritime industry so that the possibility of accidents/incidents occurrence might diminish considerably or at least be subdued.

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