

Towards Standardized Maritime Language for Communication at Sea

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ABSTRACT: The paper deals with attempts of international community at standardizing the language used for communication at sea. Key terms include Seaspeak, Wavelengths, Anglosea project, International Standard Marine Vocabulary, Standard Marine Communication Phrases, MarEng project materials.

1 INTRODUCTION

For many years there have been numerous efforts undertaken to standardize the language used for communication at sea between ships in different situations, between ships and VTS shore stations or between ships and helicopters in case of rescue operations.

These efforts were considerably speeded up by various disasters at sea where the lack of effective communication was evident like in the case of the "Scandinavian Star" or the "Estonia" where commands for evacuation were given in different national languages, which took a long time and resulted in heavy loss of life.

The early attempts were made by prof. Peter Strevens from Wolfson College, Cambridge and Captain Fred Weeks from Plymouth Polytechnic who developed message markers and published "Seaspeak" and "Wavelengths". Both handbooks were introduced and used in nautical colleges and maritime universities in different parts of the world.

At the same time the Canadian Coast Guard College in Nova Scotia started work on the Anglosea project and soon three video tapes covering St. Lawrence Seaway, The English Channel and Ship Repair in La Spezia were produced. They helped not only in practical training of the students by providing examples of communication on board ship in different parts of the world but also in raising the awareness of the importance of clear and unambiguous communication for the safety of the vessel, her crew and her cargo.

Way back in 1973, the IMO Maritime Safety Committee, at its twenty-seventh session, agreed that where language difficulties arise a common lan-

guage should be used for navigational purposes and that language should be English. As we could see from numerous examples of disasters at sea, it was not always the case in practice.

In consequence of the IMO Maritime Safety Committee's decision, the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary was developed. It was adopted in 1977 and after being used in nautical colleges and maritime universities it was revised and amended in 1985.

The amended version was widely used both in maritime education and training institutions ashore and on board ships.

But accidents and disasters at sea have still been happening so there was a need for a more comprehensive version of the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary to improve communication among multi-lingual crews on board different ships.

In 1992, the IMO Maritime Safety Committee, at its sixtieth session, instructed the Sub-committee on Safety of Navigation to work on a more comprehensive standardized safety language than the SMNV 1985, taking into consideration the changing conditions of modern seafaring and covering all major forms of safety-related verbal communication.

In 1997, the IMO Maritime Safety Committee, at its sixty-eighth session adopted the Draft IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) developed by the Sub-committee on Safety of Navigation.

Following the trial period at various maritime and training institutions, the Draft IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases was amended at the forty-sixth session of that Sub-committee.

Many of the remarks were taken into account by the organization and the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases were given final consideration at its seventy-fourth session.

In November 2001 the IMO Standard Marine Communication phrases were adopted by the Assembly as resolution A.918/22

Under the international convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch-keeping for Seafarers, 1978, as revised 1995, the ability to use and understand the IMO SMCP is required for the certification of officers in charge of the navigational watch on board ships of 500 gross tonnage and more.

This requirement sparked off the development of various teaching materials in many parts of the world. Among them is the multi-media project called MarEng, which is one of the EU projects in the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

It is a multi-media teaching and learning tool aimed at improving the knowledge of Maritime English of not only distance learners on board ships but also both the students and the teachers at nautical colleges and maritime universities all over the world.

Gdynia Maritime University in Poland is one of the material-making partners to the MarEng project. The other partners include:

- University of Antwerp, Institute of Transport and Maritime Management in Belgium
- University of Antwerp, Department of Business Communication in Belgium
- University of La Laguna, School of Nautical and Sea-related Studies, English and German Linguistic Studies, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain
- University of Helsinki, Department of Translation Studies in Finland
- Åland Polytechnic, The Åland Maritime Institute in Mariehamn, Finland
- Sydvest Polytechnic, School of Maritime Studies in Turku, Finland
- Latvian Maritime Academy in Riga, Latvia
- University of Turku, Finland

Centre for Maritime Studies in Turku has been the co-ordinator of the MarEng project and the Lingonet company Oy in Turku has been responsible for the task of putting the material and the interactive exercises into a multi-media format.

The MarEng project is an international project aiming at promoting the Maritime English competence of the people working in various maritime professions in different parts of the world so the intended users include those actually working at sea as well as those studying and working in a wide range of sea-related areas.

The MarEng project started in November 2004 and was completed in May 2007. Its final product is a web-based Maritime English learning tool in the form of an organised database of various Maritime English teaching and learning materials and a CD-rom.

The MarEng materials can be used online in the college classroom, in distance learning and for self-study purposes. There are a number of recorded texts and exercises of different types which the students are encouraged to do. Some parts of the MarEng materials are also available in the PDF format. The entire MarEng tool has been available on the Internet since April 2007, free of charge. It can also be downloaded from the website <http://mareng.utu.fi>

The MarEng materials produced so far are suitable for different language levels namely the intermediate level and advanced level.

Intermediate level materials cover the following sections:

- 1 In Port
- 2 Welcome to a Modern Port
- 3 Loading the MS Marina
- 4 The Ship and her crew
- 5 Leaving port
- 6 In the Fairway
- 7 Heavy Weather
- 8 Mayday Mayday
- 9 The crew and its tasks
- 10 At Sea – changing the watch
- 11 Survival in an emergency
- 12 Helicopter Rescue
- 13 An Encounter with the Coast Guard

The MarEng learning material in the intermediate section is based on the idea of a virtual ship on a voyage from the port of Santander in Spain to the port of Kotka in Finland, calling at a number of ports on the way. During the voyage, the crew of the mv “Marina” faces a number of routine situations as well as some unusual ones in which Maritime English is used both on board ship and in port loading and discharging operations.

Most of the texts have been recorded as well as numerous vocabulary and grammar exercises have been provided. There are clear instructions on how to use the programme and the students can listen to recordings as many times as they wish to do so.

There is also a section on maritime glossary with explanations in each of the sections.

Advanced level materials correspond to the topics covered in the intermediate level sections and include:

- Port Operations
- Shipping and Maritime Management
- Cargo Handling

- Vessel Types
- The Engine Room
- Cargo Space
- Port State Control
- Vessel Traffic Services (VTS)
- Ice Navigation
- Weather
- Radio Communication
- Radio Medical
- SMCP

The materials have been evaluated and tested by Advisory Partners including:

- APEC Antwerp/Flanders Port Training Centre in Belgium
- Finnish Ship Officers Union in Finland
- National Board of Education in Finland
- Latvian Maritime Administration in Riga, Latvia
- BORE Oy in Finland

Those interested in using the MarEng programme online are welcome to visit the webpage of the MarEng project at <http://mareng.utu.fi> or visit our computer laboratory where the MarEng programme has been downloaded on all the computers and see for themselves how the programme works and how can it be used in class.

Using the MarEng materials in practice will hopefully improve the knowledge of Maritime English among the multi-lingual crews resulting in better communication on board multi-national vessels, in more efficient port operations and safer navigation.

In conclusion, I would like to say that a follow-up to the MarEng project is now under way. It is called the MarEngPlus project and is going to cover the elementary level Maritime English materials.

The MarEngPlus project started on 1st October 2008 and will be completed by the end of 2010. It is also partly funded by the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme.

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