From General Maritime English to Specific Maritime English-Some Thought on the Revision to the 2009 Edition of IMO Maritime English Model Course 3.17

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Abstract: This paper expresses some thought on the revision to the 2009 edition of IMO Maritime English Model Course 3.17. It starts with the changes and challenges that have occurred with the amendments of the STCW Convention at Manila, and goes on with the observations and considerations of the possible principles for the revision. The paper argues that since the requirements and recommendations set in the newly amended convention are more specific, the course should be revised accordingly in correspondence with the specific requirements set and the methodology of the instruction should be adjusted with orientation toward communication competence and specific tasks and duties of the seafarers in English.

Key words: General maritime English, specific maritime English, communicative competence, task-based instruction.

1. Introduction

1.1 Current Model Course

The 2009 edition of IMO Maritime English Model Course 3.17 is a revised edition of the version developed in 1987 to meet one of the objectives that ensure trainees in their applying for officers in charge of a navigation watch, an engineering watch and ratings forming part of a navigational watch with sufficient KUP (knowledge, understanding and proficiency) in English as specified in the STCW Conventions. The Model Course has since its issuance played an active role in providing instructors in the maritime education and training community with the suggested framework.

1.2 2010 Manila Amendments

Since the objective of the course is bound up closely with the requirements and recommendations of the STCW Conventions as mended, the model is subject to constant revision in conformation with the

change of the convention. Currently there came an amendment of the conventions, namely the 2010 Manila Amendments to the code that requires the course to be revised accordingly. Different from the 1995 amendments, the relevant KUP of competence in English was amended in the 2010 Manila Amendments to the STCW Code as 1) for the officer in charge of a navigational watch, part of the KUP related to competence of the "use the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases and use English in written and oral form" was amended from "communicate with other ships and coast stations" to "communicate with other ships, coast stations and VTS centres" in Table A-II/1; and 2) for electro-technical officer, competence of "use English in written and oral form" and the related KUP was added in Table A. It has obviously exceeded beyond the scope and objectives of the current model course, the required performances of competence in the English language for electro-technical officers in particular.

In addition to the change that occurred in the amendments in 2010, three other model-training

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courses revised in accordance with the 2010 Manila Amendments have set specific required performance regarding to the KUP of competence in the English language in their corresponding detailed teaching syllabi. Take the course for officers in charge of a navigational watch for example; the general requirement of English as "use English in written and oral form" has been specified into (1) use charts and other nautical publications; (2) understand meteorological information and messages concerning ship's safety and operation; (3) communicate with other ships, coast stations and VTS centres; (4) perform the officer's duties also with a multilingual crew; and (5) use the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases.

1.3 IMLA's Responses

Correspondingly, the IMLA, much alert to the changes, has pointed out that a number of required performances identified in the Maritime English course are not fully consistent with those listed in the three courses mentioned above. In other words, certain required performances regarding to the KUP of competence in the English language listed in the three courses are not clearly identified or even totally absent in the Maritime English course such as "perform the officer's duties" and "also with a multilingual crew" etc. Therefore the IMLA has proposed that the current Maritime English Model Course be revised based on such principles as 1) the course should cover the KUP relative to the competence of "use the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases in written and oral form" as amended in Table A-II/1 of the Manila Amendments; 2) the course scope should cover the required performances of competence in the English language for Electro-Technical Officer; and 3) the required performances regarding the KUP of competence in the English language listed in the course should be consistent with three courses and other relevant courses so that the identification of these required performances can be clearly conducted.

2. Challenges and Considerations

2.1 Specification of the Requirements

It is not difficult to notice that the general orientation of the 2010 Manila Amendments is a further specification of the relative requirements of the performances in relation to the KUP competence in the English language. What is exemplified in the three courses is more obvious of the orientation. Originally, the statement of the English language competence is rather general as "use English in written or oral form", which allows much room for the model course developer and instructor of the course to walk between the general English instruction and the instruction of English for specific purposes, an issue to be further explored later. This amendment, however, restricted such room by emphasizing the correspondence between the specific duties and competence of the language in carrying out such duties. Language competence is no longer just to communicate orally or graphically but to "use charts and other nautical publications, understand meteorological information and message in concern, and perform the officer's duties in English. Such an orientation causes a challenge to the current model course that has been developed virtually based on the principle of general English instruction graded according to complexity of the structures in phonology, vocabulary, and grammar.

2.2 General English or English for Specific Purposes

English education can be classified into two broad classes, one being English for general purpose of education, and the other for specific applications. The former is referred to in practice as general English (GE for short), and the latter as English for specific purposes (ESP for short). (Harding 2007; Belcher 2009; Paltridge 2012) GE education attaches great importance to the language itself, namely its pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary items, grammatical structures and discourse organizations. The competence of the language is divided into

listening, speaking, reading and writing. The overall purpose of the instruction is to teach the language for the language and sometimes literature perhaps. Indeed, even at the stage of literature instruction, it still aims at the language-teaching advanced English through literature! ESP, however, shifts its attention from the language to the actual application of the language. The central position of the language has been reduced into a position as a medium: a way by which specific purpose of some kind is realized.

The issue of the relation between GE and ESP has long been an issue of controversy. Some believe that ESP cannot go without GE since English is the base for the specific purposes. Others even argue that there is no need of such term as ESP. One who is good at English will have no problem to deal with any subject matter in English not matter how specific it would be. The only problem perhaps is the problem of time, the duration for one to adapt his/her general English to the use of specific subject matters. The voices of the other side sound that the difference between GE and ESP is great. The language used in literature is different from the language used in other fields, say that of legislation, for instance. The same word would have an entire different semantic meaning when used in different areas. It is often the case for one good at GE but weak at ESP to misunderstand and even make serious mistakes upon the occasion of communication in specific areas, technical ones in particular. Therefore, they claim, ESP is an indispensable proportion of the English language education.

While coming into the specific aspect of methodology of the instruction, the controversy seems to be more comprehensive and complex. GE favored methodologists confirm that no matter how specific the purpose would be, one has to learn the language first and foremost. It is the essential base. Without it, the specific purpose of any kind could hardly be realized. With its longer history and stronger tradition, the GE oriented methodology is not only overwhelming in courses of GE education but in most of the courses of the education of ESP. Perhaps the current model course is just the case. It is absolutely right that ESP can hardly go without GE, but the point of time for adaptation makes the sense. How long would one good at GE adapt his/her English in general to the specific? Is it in a sense that the process of adaptation is simply the process of learning ESP? And then why not start the process at the very beginning? Answers to these questions would help one to realize certain principles with which the current model course is to be revised.

2.3 Language Structure or Communicative Competence

In the domain of language education, there has long been a discussion about aims of the instruction: teaching language or communication. Some of the essential ideas in the discussion are of significance to the development of the principles for the current revision of the model course. As earlier as the beginning of the 1970's, Widdowson (1978) initiated the idea of use and usage. By usage, it means the language, namely the grammatical structures. Teaching usage means teaching the grammar. By use on the other hand, it means the actual application of the language; in other words, the communication in the real world where the language is used. The relation between usage and use, the issue is apparently identical of the GE and ESP relation, was the centre of the concern. Some believe that an affective use of the language would not be possible without a satisfactory store of usages, and others have gone even further to argue that a good store of language usages is just enough for anyone who wants to use the language to cope with communications of any kind. Therefore, language instruction is just matter of teaching grammatical structures in sounds, words, sentences, and meanings. Actual use of the language is not the primary concern of the instruction. Perhaps this is the essential argument for the methodology of grammar translation that overwhelmed the domain of language

education for a long time.

Once again, there is the question of time. It is true the use of the language should be based on the usage of the language. Without a sufficient knowledge and skill in handling the structures of the language, it is hardly imaginable what would happen during the actual use of the language. But when one is competent in language structure does not mean he/she is competent in communication. There is a gap, more often than not very great, between linguistic competence (Chomsky 1965; Matthews 2014) and communicative competence (Hyme 1972; Rickheit and Strhner 2008). There is again therefore a necessary duration of adaptation to bridge the gap between the two. In other words, the student with a good enough competence in the language has to learn how to make use of his usages when the actual communication calls upon. In fact, it is the question of efficiency, efficiency of the instruction, namely. Teaching use along with usages saves time and improves the efficiency.

2.4 Pedagogic Tasks or Real Tasks

Teaching use rather than usage is the central tenet of the communicative approach that takes communicative competence as its primary target for the instruction. Then how to teach communication? Widdowson (1978) states: teach communication by communication. More specifically, teaching process is chopped into different but coherent chunks of tasks, an approach generally referred to as Task-based Instruction (TBI for short)(Ellis 2003; Nunan 2004; Richards and Rogers 2014). The methodology of TBI emphasizes TASK, believing that by making the teaching process as a series of fulfilling specific tasks the orientation of communication in the language instruction is guaranteed and enhanced. Obviously, it is the further development of the communicative approach.

But there is a serious challenge to this approach; that is how to design the tasks? Since classroom is a part of the real world in a sense, but not a real world in another. Communication in the classroom is not in its strict sense the real world communication. Therefore, there is a problem of tasks being artificial, pedagogic in a sense, and being real, actual, namely. Consequently, almost any task designed for the classroom instruction of the language could be artificial and pedagogical. It is the dilemma the TBI approach with communication as its orientation has been struggling with. One way out has been the attempt to make the task as real as possible. The challenge for ESP in this account might be far less serious, since the very specific task of the real world could be taken directly into the teaching process as one of its procedures, officer's duties of watch in marine affair for example.

2.5 General Maritime English vs. Specific Maritime English

The instruction of maritime English belongs fundamentally to the part of ESP. Students learn English with the specific purpose of dealing with marine affairs. Likewise instructors teach English to help their students to cope with the specific tasks the sea business incurs upon them. They need the competence in GE, but they need more the competence in ESP, the ability to cope with the real tasks in the real world.

It is brilliant of the Revision of IMO Maritime English Model Course Working Group First Meeting hosted by Shanghai Maritime University in April 2014, Shanghai to have developed the idea of General Maritime English (GME for short) and Specific Maritime English (SME). By GME, it is meant that first stage of maritime English instruction could be general. The word general here is not the word general in GE, but "salted" or "marinated" English in general metaphorically. By SME, it is meant that the second stage of the maritime English instruction could be specific. The very tasks of the real marine world are to be taken directly into the process of the instruction. If

it is apparently that GE still remains as an important part in GME, its importance is reduced drastically in SME. Similarly, linguistic competence, namely the KUP in the English language, seems to be more essential in GME while communicative competence, namely KUP of the specific duties are to be taken priority in SME. The relation between GME and SME is one of the gradation and preparation: GME leading into SME, the former being the preparation for the latter.

3. Proposals for the Principles

3.1 ESP Orientation

It is essential to keep in mind that maritime English course is fundamentally a course of ESP with maritime communication as its primary concern. One of the principles for the current revision should be ESP oriented rather GE oriented. In other words, revise the current model course with priority given to the purpose of marine communication.

3.2 Communicative Competence

In order to realize the specific purpose of maritime communication in the English language, competence of real maritime communication should be much emphasized in the forthcoming edition of the model course. To be specific, communication competence is not be taken as one of the themes but the theme of the revised version, especially at the second stage, the stage of SME, namely.

3.3 Task Target

The actual process of instruction shall be designed with targets of specific tasks of the real world of seafarers. Make them as real as possible.

3.4 Two Stages

In consideration of the international applicability of the course, two stages of the instruction are to be designed, Stage One: GME and Stage Two: SME. These two stages might be corresponding to the two core sections in the original edition of the model course in surface, but different in content. In the part of GME, English is to be marinated and organized into Level I, II, and III, roughly corresponding to Elementary Level, Lower Intermediate Level, and Intermediate Level respectively with of course GME communicative competence as its guiding theme and organizational frame. In the part of SME, the units of lessons are to be designed and organized strictly according to the specific tasks and duties in correspondence with the requirements set in the STCW Conventions, as amended, the 2010 Manila Amendments in particular. GME is to be the preparation and leading-in stage for GME.

4. Conclusion

Perhaps it is ideal to round up this brief argument with a simple diagram and its interpretation that can be regarded as the summary of the thought with reference to the revision of the 2009 Edition of the IMO Maritime English Model Course 3. 17.

A stands for GME while B stands for SME. C refers to an interface dividing the whole process of the instruction into two and by slash indicates that starting from GE, GME is getting less and less of GE in A while in B, SME starts at the very beginning, to marinate

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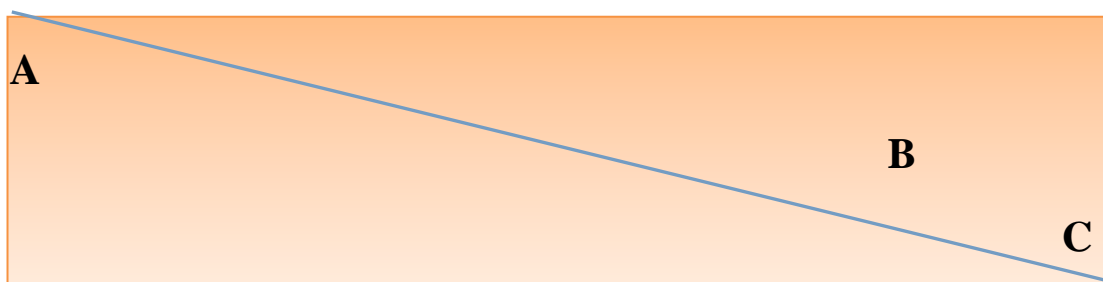
GE, so to speak, and turns more and more specific towards SME and finally to its completion. The interface C also denotes the proceeding of the communicative competence from the linguistic competence, which starts at the very beginning at the GME stage and gets more and more communication oriented and less and less language focused in the part of SME.

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