

# **INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS OF MARITIME ENGLISH AS A MEANS TO IMPROVE SAFETY AT SEA**

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This article gives background information about MarTEL Project and its achievements. The MarTEL Project is being developed by several European countries within the frameworks of European Union Leonardo da Vinci educational programme in order to establish international standards in Maritime English. In 2009 Ukraine – Kyiv State Maritime Academy, in particular, joined the project. Ukraine occupies the 5<sup>th</sup> place in the world in manpower for different ranks and classes of seafarers working on multi-national and multi-flagged vessels. The participation of the a Ukrainian higher educational institution in this project is one indication that Ukraine is interested and involved with international co-operation in order to reduce merchant vessels incidents and accidents caused by the human factor relating to Maritime English communication failure on board ships and in ports.

**Keywords:** Maritime English, international standards, safety of shipping, Leonardo projects.

## **1. INNOVATION PROJECT MARTEL (UK/07/LLP-LdV/TOI-049)**

The purpose of MarTEL (Maritime Tests of English Language) is to create world-wide supported Maritime English standards as well as offering a comprehensive set of guidelines, teaching/learning and assessment materials. The goals of the Project also include the establishment of Maritime English standards sets similar to those existing in General English such as TOEFL, IELTS and so forth. In other words, the project aims to create a system of Maritime English proficiency assessment tests on the basis of the model course developed by IMO (IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases) for all types and ranks of merchant vessel crews. Shipping is considered to be one of the most important and dangerous sectors of world economy; therefore, the safety of seafarers, cargoes and vessels are of utmost priority for the shipping industry. Communication failure on board a vessel is one of the major reasons of incidents and accidents (Ziarati. 2006, Ziarati et al 2009, ). Elimination or reduction of risk in shipping accidents and how the Maritime English standards are observed by all participants in this important and significant economy's sector: government, shipowners, crewing companies, etc is and should an important consideration by all concerned. The MarTEL Project partners have been developing Maritime English tests and associated documents for both deck and engineering departments (ratings and officers including cadet officer as well as senior ranks). Much attention is being paid to dissemination of the standards, the challenge of training of the teachers, provision for distance and e-learning in the system of Maritime English teaching/learning practical activities, implementation of the pilot project for the establishment of Maritime English Certification Centre, etc. More details on the project can be found in [www.maritime-tests.org](http://www.maritime-tests.org) and [www.martel.pro](http://www.martel.pro).

## **2. PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF TEACHING MARITIME ENGLISH: LINGUISTIC, METHODOLOGICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL.**

Participation in the MarTEL Project gives the partners and those associated with project the opportunity to analyse all aspects of Maritime English content and delivery aspects in teaching of this increasing important subject and to draw the conclusion about the necessity of taking them into account when developing national and international standards.

**Linguistic aspect.** Researchers emphasize on the global nature of English (*Global English, International English* – A. Soderlind), call English *lingua franca* (Cole and Trenkner). For people who work in multinational working environment, Maritime English is considered to be *an operational language*, the language with some restrictions if the functional characteristics are concerned in the specific area of merchant marine transports (Ziarati, 2008). The linguistic analysis indicates the availability of considerable lexical "burden" of special terms, relatively a short list of grammar structures and strikingly serious set of phonetic peculiarities in Maritime English use. Specific features of Maritime English cause certain difficulties in mastering the system of maritime terms in which a term is not only a language unit but represents a notion belonging to the special sphere of knowledge. If all these linguistic factors are taken into account in university curricula it is possible to foresee that they have a chance of being successfully used for effective training of would-be deck and engineering crew members. Still, as many professionals think, Maritime English is not the whole English language which is required for

communication in different spheres of life. The problem of co-relationship of General English and Maritime English appears when developing the assessment and various teaching/learning materials (studybooks, in particular) that meet all vital needs of the learners at different level of proficiency. There are also methodological, psychological and social issues related to the efficiency and effectiveness of language learning. Some aspect of these are noted in Roenig and Urisz (2009) and the following are summary of the main findings in the research which led to the development of this article.

**Methodological aspect.** The most serious platform for practical researches is ESP (English for Specific Purposes). After the revolution in linguistics, when it was found out that any language analysis presumes the study of actual communication materials, it became obvious that the methodological aspirations should be focused exceptionally on the learners' needs, meaning that the professional needs acquire priority (development of skills for a given vocation/employment). Learners' language skills, viz., listening, speaking, writing and reading combine the competence which is defined sufficient or insufficient for their professional activities. The MarTEL Project partners have been developing a system of tests which takes into account real communication needs of the seafarers. Thus, the project concentrates on the coordination in work of Maritime specialists and language teachers. This is the area of mutual interests where training of teaching staff in rather specific sphere, namely shipping, has and appears to be a great challenge.

**Psychological aspect.** Discussions on the problem of appropriate method of selection have proven that the best one is the method which is the most adequate for the learners and their vital interests. Variety of tasks, learning materials, study packs as well as sufficient level of the learner's motivation guarantee the openness of both the student and the teacher, evoke the response to real communication and the interest to the future profession.

**Social aspect.** It is known, that the labour market is the best factor for motivating students in the process of their studies. In the industry of water transportation this problem is being solved through acquiring by students and graduates of real communication experience working in multi-national environments when some incidents of intercultural and interconfessional nature may take place. Moreover, sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects combined with specific labour conditions on a merchant vessel, climatic and weather factors in everyday work of seafarers, pressure of working conditions, isolation in long voyages, health problems, together with the special seafarers' status require extreme concentration and hard work in the course of their professional training including Maritime English proficiency, thus, making them achieve the highest level of professional competency in order to be safe at sea, avoid risks of endangering others and reducing the chances of damaging property.

### **3. UNIFICATION OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ENGLISH STANDARDS**

The practice of deck and engineering crew training in Maritime English is carried out in close connection with development of national and international standards. A standard serves as a model, a sample. It is established by professional administrations, and represents a level of quality or achievement used for judging someone or something. Even when national standards in Maritime English are available, they still differ in various countries.

National Maritime English standards in detailed form do not exist in Ukraine. The National Standard of Maritime Education for Bachelor and Master Degrees both deck and engineering departments suggest only general instructions and notions. The achievements of Ukrainian Maritime English specialists are significant (Ivasyuk, 2007); still they have not as yet crowned with job-orientated standards. At the same time, international organisations and all parties involved demand global standards of Maritime English with the intention of removing the differences between the seafarers trained in English speaking countries and those who receive Maritime education and training in non-English speaking countries. Therefore, the MarTEL Project partners are rightly interested in dissemination of both ideas of international standards and materials developed to support them. In this situation, the international Maritime English standards is expected positively to influence the creation and further development of national Maritime education standards and help to unify requirements of all institutions dealing with recruiting and certification of seafarers.

### **4. TESTS IN THE SYSTEM OF INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ENGLISH STANDARDS**

Testing is an integral part of any specialists' education. It is an objective, effective tool, simple in use when defining the level of the professional competences. Still, the contents of tests series demand thorough analysis of correct assessment of students' skills as well as clear differentiation of professional specialist tests and professional language tests.

MarTEL is a language (including oral) test system which should be adopted by representatives of international shipping industry to certify seafarers' professional competences of all ranks, specialities and nationalities in Maritime English.

The concept of MarTEL foresees the development of assessment materials in case a new position is introduced on a merchant vessel. The international standard MarTEL is a software interactive test system which can be easily used in any educational establishment, for more information in the Internet platform refer to [www.martel.pro](http://www.martel.pro).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Adaptation and approbation of the tests in different Maritime institutions of Europe will take place according to the MarTEL pilot project aiming to evaluate and improve professional language skills of ratings, junior and senior officers. It is expected that the project will radically improve the level of Maritime education since competence in Maritime English not only will improve the communication skills of seafarers but also their learning potential. It also is expected to make the merchant navy a more professional service and make it more efficient and effective and hence more competitive. Maritime English as acquired the special status for professional achievements and enlarges the the basis for successful merchant navy operation.

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