Maritime English, Critical Thinking and American ESL Programs

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ABSTRACT

The IMO clearly requires adequate communication skills in the language of English; for many Maritime Universities, however, often the resources allocated to the teaching of English are minimal and the acquisition of sound speaking and writing skills are subordinated to the acquisition of technical maritime expertise. A solution to this dilemma can be found by turning to the pedagogical strategies and extensive resources being produced in U.S. ESL (English as a Second Language) programs.

Because of a dramatic increase in the number of non-English speakers gaining admission to U.S. colleges and universities, many of these academic institutions have had to radically redefine and develop writing programs to accommodate this new population. One result of this transformation is a shift in the way educators think about teaching language: while it is widely recognized that the communicative approach to teaching language emphasizes vocabulary, syntax, and the meaning of language, recent developments suggest that students also need to use creative and critical thinking skills. Moreover, these critical capabilities need to be implemented not as latter-stage, upper-level objectives, but rather through a methodology embedded in the subject matter and woven into the curriculum at all levels.

English language instructors at International Maritime Universities should avail themselves to the resources established by U.S. ESL programs, specifically those which are disseminated freely to the international community via the world wide web. Such resources include, but are not limited to, downloadable web-based educational material, reviews of effective pedagogical strategies, and opportunities for online international communication partnerships between students of different countries. By exploiting and utilizing the groundwork already covered by other universities, and by modifying this work to suit our own needs and desires, the efficiency of teaching Maritime English can be dramatically improved.

1. Introduction

A treatise on the subject of Maritime English from an American perspective may at first seem odd; after all, this is a topic which presumably only impact those Maritime Universities located in countries for which English is a foreign language.   Yet, due to immigration trends and the

perpetuation of immigrant languages passed from generation to generation, for millions of Americans, English *is* a foreign language. The latest U.S. census reports that 46 million Americans speak a language other than English, with seven languages--Spanish, French, German, Italian, Chinese, Vietnamese and Tagalog--claiming over one million speakers (U.S. Government Census, 2000). Concomitantly, the U.S. is drawing many foreign nationals to its universities at both the graduate and undergraduate level, and thus the need to teach basic English skills at institutions of higher education has become increasingly significant.

The demographics at The California Maritime Academy reflect these national trends: not only do a statistically significant number of our students come from other countries (including Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Colombia, Russia, and Kuwait), but there are many native-born students whose primary language spoken at home is not English (CMA Annual Statistical Report 2001-2002). These students identify their ethnicity as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cambodian, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Filipino, Korean, Laotian, and Asian Indian (CMA Annual Statistical Report 2001-2002). Needless to say, it is very difficult for Cal Maritime--as is the case with many other small schools with similar student populations--to cater to the specialized linguistic needs of each student.

Although it is hard for smaller schools to adequately allocate resources for the teaching of English, this is not necessarily the case for larger universities and colleges. In response to the increased volume of non-English speakers seeking higher education, nearly every major university and college in the U.S. has spent many years and allocated extensive resources to the development and implementation of ESL Programs. This paper argues that that the materials available in the U.S. for instructing non-native speakers of English can be appropriated and modified for use in Maritime English programs throughout the world.

To recognize that there is a significant student population that is in dire need of basic English education is only the first step in identifying the problem. The next stage is one of pedagogy and implementation: *how* should English be taught? Does one stress grammar and syntax or conversational forms? What should be the relationship between writing and speaking as communicative operations? How do these students actually learn and retain knowledge? And if you have a class comprised of speakers of German, Chinese, Arabic, and French, what teaching strategies would be effective for all? While the subject still generates a great deal of vital discussion, a general consensus recognizes that student-centered, problem-solving instruction is much more effective than rote memorization and static translation exercises.

2. Literature Survey of ESL Pedagogy

While the specific terminology describing the kind of teaching which takes place in American ESL programs may change from institution to institution, in general these programs share a common pedagogic philosophy: one that subscribes to a student-centered regime that stresses interaction and creative problem-solving techniques. The basis of this philosophy can be traced to the work of Paulo Freire, an international instructor of adult literacy. According to Freire, the central problem of all education is that teachers lead students to mechanically memorize specific content via a one-way transmission of information which is divorced from the "real world" and

leads to unimaginative and uninterested students. (Freire, 1970). The teacher in this scenario does more than simply bore his students, he actually stifles creativity and reinforces a pattern of domination and oppression which impedes and contaminates the learning process. Instead, Freire argues, attention should be given to what he calls "problem-posing education;" that which enables students to see language as a means by which to shape their thoughts about problems in the world, and then respond to them. In this way, "knowledge emerges through invention and reinvention, and communication gives students the power to see themselves as subjects in the world with the power to transform that world" ((Freire, 1970) Communication, then, is the foundation upon which knowledge is gained, and by teaching communication skills through a problem-posing model students are encouraged to think critically about other matters in and outside of the classroom. Put another way, learning to effectively communicate is not a skill to be mastered only as a means to an end, nor should it be viewed as subordinate to other, more "pragmatic" vocational skills, but rather should be recognized as that which enables all other authentic learning experiences to take place.

Other scholars of education have built upon and adapted Freire's ideas. For Jack Mezirow (1991), the very heart of learning lies in the way we process experience, and how we critically reflect on this experience. For David Kolb, leaning is a cycle that begins with experience, continues with reflection, and later leads to action which itself becomes a concrete experience for reflection (Kelley, 1997). Whether one terms this approach to teaching as problem-posing education (Freire), transformative learning (Mezirow), or experiential learning (Kolb), the underlying dynamic is the same: allow students to interact with teachers and with one another in ways which draw upon their experiences and challenge them critically and creativity, and the object lesson will be achieved.

This pedagogy does not remain in the purview of theoreticians, nor is it exclusive to Western schools or even ESL programs. In their paper on Problem-Based Learning in Maritime Education, Tuna, Cerit, Kisi and Paker inform us that the Dokuz Eylul University School of Maritime Business and Management has adopted a student-centered education system which understands that "in order for any learning activity to take place, there must be at the stage a motive, desire, and interest. These incentives are raised by the problem, which must be designed in accordance with the specific goal aimed. The problem also serves a challenge to students' reasoning or problem-solving skills as an organizer for their learning. The only way to discover what you already know, what you have really stored in your memory, is to work with a problem." In the recent Dutch publication, *The International Maritime Language Program*, the author P.C. van Kluijven writes in his preface that the textbook was designed for students to "acquire knowledge not merely by 'learning by heart' but by a variety of topic-related linguistic tools that will make learning great fun and effective." Through the use of writing response exercises, computer-aided presentations, and problem-posing maritime scenarios, the text builds a proficiency in the English language through interactive, creative and fluid models. Furthermore, in a paper given last year for the International Seminar on Maritime English, A. Winbow (2002) recognizes the difficulty in teaching English but also insists that:

> *"the responsibility of those who teach English to seafarers is a major one. The task of the teacher is to create sufficient opportunities for learning to take place. Communicative language teaching makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication and the SMCP provides a very useful tool for developing those situations. Unlike the more traditional audiolingual method of language teaching, which relies on repetition and drills, the communicative approach can vary according to the student's reactions and responses. The real-life simulations can be changed from day to day and be made*

> *topical. Teachers can set up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life and the students' motivation and understanding can be enhanced through communication on meaningful topics."*

Certainly Maritime Universities implement this methodology in many disciplines: the use of training ships and simulators presuppose the efficacy of the experiential, problem-solving model. The question remains, however, how this might be used in English instruction. Despite the noble rhetoric of Freire, Kolb and others cited above, it has little use value if not applied to practice, and this essay now turns to see how this particular pedagogy not only works in U.S. ESL programs, but how the work generated by these programs can serve the needs and interests of International Maritime Universities.

3. Analysis and Discussion of Web-Based ESL Material

For any ESL material to be useful for the International Maritime community, it must be easily accessible, which means it must be available on the internet. Any information not disseminated through this medium, regardless of its quality, is very difficult to retrieve and reproduce and thus has very little value for our purposes. Fortunately, there is a wealth of information available online, and these resources can be organized into three general categories: downloadable web-based educational material, trade publications that evaluate current trends in the field and offer reviews of teaching methods, and opportunities for online international communication partnerships.

In searching for ESL material online, as is the case in any subject search, it becomes readily apparent that there is an incredible amount of material which must be evaluated, and the evaluative criteria can be divided into four general categories: cost, copyright, competency, and content. First, ESL sites have different relationships with consumers in the online community. Many sites are free, others are free but require registration from an accredited institution, and still others require a "tuition" payment or subscriber's fee. It would be up to the individual or English department staff to determine whether or nor a particular program is worth additional fees, but most needs can be more that adequately filled simply using the free sites. Second, it's important to note that copyright restrictions and public access vary from site to site. In general, ESL online material is copyrighted to a particular university or college, but placed on the net for the free use of the entire internet community with the caveat that such information not be reproduced for profit. Most sites clearly state their own positions regarding use and reproduction on their homepage. Evaluation of the competency and content of particular ESL sites is accomplished by being well-versed in information literacy. Since there are no international regulations or standards in place on the world wide web, individual educators must decide what is worthy and relevant. Some sites are created by non-English speakers and are rife with errors; others are intellectually substandard, while still others cater to a non-academic audience altogether. Finally, it must be acknowledged that there is always a possibility for pages on the internet to disappear without notice: funding dries up, sites are not maintained, programs lose space on their server, and educators must plan accordingly.

The following sections provide an overview of the kind of ESL material available online, along with a discussion and critique of the overall value of the material and how it might fit into a

curriculum of Maritime English. A more detailed listing of sites, programs and organizations are included in an appendix.

Section One: Educational Material

Many ESL sites provide instruction in English grammar, syntax, punctuation, pronunciation, and vocabulary. These pages mirror those traditional hard copy textbooks and workbooks with explanations of various grammar rules, definitions of specific words, and examples of English sentence structures. The more effective sites are those that have interactive capabilities, wherein a student is able to complete exercises and get immediate feedback. Such exercises conform to the student-centered pedagogy previously discussed: by enabling students of English to get instant assistance as they create sentences and paragraphs, the students are able to master complex structures quickly and efficiently.

By way of example, the following reproduced webpage from The English Language Web Project (http://www.ManyThings.org) demonstrates the kind of material available. (This particular project is actually created by American English instructors working out of the Aichi Institute of Technology in Tokyo, but their page is emblematic of other, U.S.-originated sites). A variety of hyperlinks leads the students to a number of different exercises:

Quizzes

Flash Quizzes (F)
VOA Quizzes (F)
Slang (280+ Expressions)
Proverbs (230+ Commonly-Used Proverbs)
Super Quiz Machine - 3,000+ Questions (CGI & JS)
Easy Vocabulary Quizzes (JS)
Quiz Show (J)

Vocabulary Study

Vocabulary Study Using a Cell Phone (CGI)
Flash Flashcards (F)
Search for Sentences Used by VOA (CGI)

Reading

Reading English Signs (700+ Photos)
Texts of VOA's Special English Broadcasts

Special

Daily Page (New Every Day)

Site Map

Site Map

Word Puzzles

Anagrams (600+)
Word Find / Word Search (J)
Scrambled Words (J)
Jumble (J)
Crossword Puzzles - VOA's Special English Verbs (F)

Sentence Puzzles

Scrambled Sentences (JS or J)
PhraseDaze (F)

Grammar Fun

Random Sentence Generator (JS)
Magnet Boards (J)
English Sentence Machine (F)

For the *Many Things* Textbook

For Students - Activities
For Teachers - Sample Pages

Word Games

Flash Hangman (F)
JavaScript Hangman (JS)
Java Hangman (J)
CGI Hangman (CGI)
WordMeister (J)
Word Based Games: JigWords, MatchWords & SpeedWords (F)

Pages with Sound

American English Pronunciation Practice (F)

Experimental

Sentence Singer (F)
Web Site Theme Song (F)
Travel Survival
LS PHPWebQuiz (CGI)
Speaks for Itself (Speech Synthesizer)
Computer Assisted Writing (JS & CGI)
Concentration (J)
Drag & Drop Puzzle (J)
ESL Reading Room (Using an Online Dictionary)
Slider Puzzle (J)

Only with Older Browsers
Listening Room (JS & RealAudio)

Pages such as this are numerous, and more are listed in the appendix. Before continuing, though, it is important to note that it is not enough to simply point students in the direction of English language websites. To merely give a student a computer with internet access and a list of URLs

does not lead to language proficiency. As Mark Warschaur and P. Fawn Whittaker (1997) have noted, the concept of a learner-centered curriculum meshes easily with the logic of the internet; however, "little is gained by just adding random online activities into a classroom. Clarifying course goals is, thus, an important first step toward successful use of the internet."

The responsibility of the instructor, then, is to clearly identify his or her objectives when integrating such websites into the curriculum. For Maritime English, much of this material may seem irrelevant or excessive. Yet, if the goal is to make mariners as communicationally proficient as possible, then it is philosophically dubious to claim these programs offer "too much English." Rather, the task is one of tailoring the specific needs of the Maritime University to the ESL site instead of forcing the maritime students to navigate the site without a clear objective.

Section Two: Online Journals and Periodicals

Besides a plethora of web-based material created for students, there is also a body of literature directed toward the teacher of English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language. A forum for expressing views, sharing information, and passing along teaching strategies exists in the form of online journals and periodicals. In addition to disseminating information across the ESL and EFL worldwide community, many of these publications incorporate listserves or other modes of dialogic interaction into their sites which function as inexpensive, task-specific information retrieval systems for teachers across the globe. Certainly many of these organizations would welcome a thread on Maritime English and would be willing to help in ways which could prove to be a tremendous asset.

The dominant web journal in the field is *The Internet TESL* (Test of English as a Second Language) *Journal*. Founded in 1995, this publication is divided into three sections: Articles and Research Papers, Teaching Techniques, and Lessons and Lesson Plans. Furthermore, the archives of each section are clearly subdivided into useful categories, such as Computer-Assisted Language Learning, Pronunciation, Reading, Culture, etc. The Articles section includes scholarly research in the field of ESL which could prove useful to Maritime English instructors interested in keeping up to date with the cutting edge of pedagogy and learning techniques. This section is complemented by the Lessons and Lessons Plans section, which is less theoretical and more pragmatically oriented toward the discussion of successful class strategies: how to properly integrate grammar with intercultural communication, for example, or how to more productively incorporate internet instruction into the classroom. The third section of the TESL Journal, closely related to the second, is the Teaching Techniques, with gives further information and advice to the instructor: such information here covers teaching styles, reviews of particular textbooks, how to sustain motivation in the classroom, the use of English language newspapers, etc.

Of course, *The Internet TESL* is just one journal of many. Others are listed in the appendix, but obviously different journals have different agendas and target markets and vary widely in quality. Some are geared toward a broader audience of educators, others are affiliated with publishing houses and specific textbook series, and still others have narrower professional concerns regarding unions, hiring practices and the like. Again, it would be up to each individual

instructor of Maritime English to determine his or her particular needs. Do you want to develop online simulations for your students? Try *Calico*, The Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium. Do you wish for information on integrating video technologies into English language teaching? Try the *ESL Magazine*. Many of these journals cross-reference each other via hyperlinks for ease in information retrieval.

Section Three: Resources for Cross-Cultural Communication

At the very least, most ESL websites include the email addresses of affiliated staff for feedback and correspondence; many others have more extensive networking capabilities such as listserves and messages boards. One of the more exciting prospects for use of American ESL online material is the desire of many institutions to reach out to other campuses across the world for cross-cultural communication. Often called "key-pay" programs to replace the obsolete term "pen-pal," these programs are designed to connect individuals and/or institutions from one country to another in order to foster cultural understanding and sharpen language skills. The largest such site is the Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connection (http://www.iecc.org), a free public service created to facilitate international exchanges between teachers and their classrooms, with 7650 participating instructors in 82 countries.

Although all of these networking possibilities hold promise for the instruction of English *in* English for the international maritime community, it must be acknowledged that a simple computer pen pal exchange often isn't satisfactorily educational. To return to Warschauer and Whittaker (1997), "simply put, there is no more reason to expect a significant educational outcome from simply creating a pen pal connection than there is from simply bringing two students into a room and asking them to talk. Over time, greater involvement on the teacher's part in creating learning activities that create sufficient linguistic and cognitive demands on the student is needed to get maximum benefit from Internet exchanges."

One of the possibilities that this paper would like to raise, then, is the creation of an intra-IAMU internet-based forum wherein students enrolled in Maritime Universities throughout the world could practice their English skills with each other. Such a project wouldn't be too difficult to set up with the cooperation of the information technology departments at each participating school, and it raises interesting educational opportunities. This project could be folded into the curriculum of basic English courses, with assignments involving written communication between students at different maritime universities. Imagine, even, an electronic message board on which students from, say, The California Maritime Academy could talk to students from Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, or for students at The Australian Maritime College to compare lives with students at the Kobe University of Mercantile Marine. Young mariners could hone their English skills but also learn more about different cultures, and the shared foundation of seafaring interests would insure a common ground upon which to communicate. Such an outlet goes far beyond simply improving communication skills: it fosters an understanding of different cultures and perhaps leads to lifelong ties within the international maritime community. Such a tie can only strengthen the industry as a whole.

4. Conclusion

Learning any new language is difficult, and the teaching of language is arduous, labor-intensive, and requires unique resources. For Maritime Universities charged with teaching English but not afforded the luxury of a fully-staffed professionally-trained foreign language department, teaching even the rudiments of the English language can be particularly challenging. Yet many of these difficulties can be alleviated by making use of information that already exists and that is readily available. Maritime University instructors need not re-invent the wheel, but can mine a rich vein of resources already in place.

The material is out there in the form of exercises and simulations for students, journals and periodicals for teachers, and international lines of communication between educators and pupils alike across the globe. Many people are willing to share what they know and what they have found to be successful. Maritime Universities can make use of these resources: to tailor different materials to suit specific needs is not only easier than creating similar material from scratch, it also embodies the kind of problem-solving critical activity we value and embrace in our students.

As the forces of globalization continue to collide and collude in unexpected ways in the new century, the particular challenges facing the seafarer are not always easily identified and resolved. In order to most advantageously position oneself in this new global regime, one must be able to pose and solve problems, use creative thought processes and utilize critical thinking skills. Certainly these are traits that are valued and taught across the maritime curriculum. Yet, it should be noted that these attributes can also be developed within a language program: far from being a lesser task in the larger scheme of educating mariners, the work done in language study sharpens leadership skills, increases cultural awareness, and provides a means by which to navigate the potentially volatile waters of the future.

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Appendix

What follows is only a very select and partial list of potentially useful websites, programs and organizations. It is nearly impossible to be comprehensive because new sites emerge with increasing rapidity, and as noted in the body of this essay, sites also tend to disappear without warning: funding is cut, instructors with proprietary information change institutions, server space is eliminated, some are simply not maintained

Web Sites for ESL Educational Material:
Interesting Things for ESL Students
http:///www/manythings.org
A study site for students of English as a Second Language which includes word games, puzzles, quizzes, exercises, slang, proverbs and much more.

Guide to Grammar and Writing
http://webster.comnet.edu/grammar/index.com
Created and Maintained by Capital Community College of Hartford, CT, the site has pull-down menus for language instruction on the level of sentences, paragraphs, and essays.

English Grammar Links for ESL Students
http://userpages.umbc.edu/~kpokoy1/grammar1.htm
An index page of grammar links including references, exercises and quizzes.

The Lingua Center
http://www.iei.uiuc.edu/LinguageCenter
A multimedia language laboratory of the University of Illinois which provides up-to-date technology to assist international students.

Online Journals and Periodicals:
The Internet TESL Journal
http://itselj.org
A monthly web journal of articles, lesson plans and teaching ideas with several links to other sites.

TESL-EJ
http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/tesl-ej/about.htm
A refereed journal with an editorial board in Berkeley, California and Kyoto, Japan, this periodical publishes original articles in the research and practice of English as a second language, including pedagogy, second language acquisition, language assessment, and applied socio- and psycholinguistics.

Language Learning and Technology
http://llt.msu.edu
A journal seeking to disseminate research to foreign and second language instructors on issues related to technology and language education

Lore: AN e-Journal for Teachers of Writing
http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/lore
A forum for discussing pedagogy and professional matters primarily based on composition instruction.

Calico
http://calico.org
The Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium, a professional organization that serves a membership involved in both education and high technology with an emphasis on modern language teaching and learning.

Resources for Cross-Cultural Communication:
Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connections
http://www.iecc.org
IECC is a free service to help teachers link with partners in other cultures and countries for email classroom pen-pal and other project exchanges.

Email Pen-Pal Opportunities for Students
http://www.tesolnet/teslpnpl.htm
An index page of link to both papers written by ESL professionals on their uses of email in the classroom, and organizations who try to set up teachers and students with pen-pals/

Index Pages and other Links:
Teaching.com
http://www.teaching.com
A free, non-commercial educational web service for educations and students. Quite broad in scope, it receives over 1,300,000 hits per month with 200,000 registered users from 112 different countries.

The Language Advocacy Project
http://www.albany.edu/lap/weblinks.htm
An excellent index page divided into nine subcategories.

The English Club
http://www.englishclub.com
A web association for the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language.

ESL@About.com
http://esl.about.com
A large, public site with many important links, including specific language to language pages

Yamada Language Center
http://babel.uoregon.edu/yamada/guides/esl.html
Hosted by the University of Oregon, a page of links to many ESL programs and services

Comenius English Language Center
htto://www.comenius.com
A site for students, teachers and speakers of English from around the world to have access to relevant materials, lessons, and products. Of particular interest is a program which translates the home page into a variety of different languages.