

The Professional Profile of a Maritime English Instructor (PROFS): an interim report

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Abstract

That communication within the maritime industry in general, and at sea in particular, requires a high level of competency is axiomatic. For international employees today, this inevitably means communicative competency in the English language, especially the variety commonly referred to as Maritime English. Gradually Maritime English is becoming recognised as a fully-fledged subject and the need to establish standards is an issue receiving widespread attention. In the shipping industry the increased global need to use English due to the new demands imposed by technological and commercial developments, together with high profile misdemeanours at sea causing loss of life, damage to property and environmental pollution, have resulted in the legal requirements (i.e., STCW/SOLAS) regarding communicative competency in the English language for professional purposes being considerably sharpened. The authors have observed the rise in interest and concern of maritime organisations as to how they should best accommodate these new demands. Maritime Education and Training institutions, often reluctant to recognise Maritime English on an equal footing to Navigation or Marine Engineering, or to dedicate more instruction hours in an already tight programme, have been keen to find more effective strategies. Often this is attempted by paying little or no attention to the amorphous global body of Maritime English instructors at their disposal. The Professional Profile of a Maritime English Instructor (PROFS) project aims on the one hand to create generally accepted guidelines/recommendations for MET institution management on how to qualify teachers of general English and other persons of substandard maritime-technical qualifications currently teaching English to navigational/marine engineering university students to become lecturers/instructors in Maritime English, meeting at least the requirements of the relevant legislation, and on the other hand to provide prospective candidates to the Maritime English teaching profession with an idea of what will be expected from them should they wish to instruct navigational/marine engineering students at university level. This report presents the activities and preliminary observations of the PROFS team's ongoing research.

Keywords: Maritime English (instructors), communicative competency, PROFS, profiling, twinning, typology.

1 Project aims and objectives

Various conferences, seminars and workshops have revealed that there is an urgent need to establish a sound, well-structured profile of a qualified Maritime English instructor for higher MET institutions in order both to satisfy the demands of the current legislation, as well as the requirements of today's maritime industry. Put simply, instructors of Maritime English, just like all other instructors involved in the education and training of seafarers, have to comply with Section A-I/6(3) of the STCW 1978/95 which requires, that "all instructors... are appropriately qualified for the particular types and levels of training... of seafarers either on board or ashore."

The *Professional Profile of a Maritime English Instructor (PROFS)* project aims on the one hand to create generally accepted guidelines/recommendations for MET institution management on how to qualify teachers of general English and other persons of substandard maritime-technical qualifications currently teaching English to navigational/marine engineering university students to become lecturers in Maritime English, meeting at least the requirements of the relevant legislation, and on the other hand to provide prospective candidates to a Maritime English teaching profession with an idea of what will be expected from them (both in terms of the necessary maritime background knowledge and the appropriate methodical qualification) should they wish to instruct navigational/marine engineering students at university level.

The initial idea for PROFS was hatched in discussions resulting from the researchers' own experience in combination with previous research. Two papers were prepared (Cole, Trenkner) for IAMU's AGA4 in Alexandria (September 27-October 01, 2003) and for IMLA's IMEC15 in St Petersburg (October 07-10, 2003) where the authors presented a typology of Maritime English instructors. As a result of the encouraging response, a research proposal application was made to IAMU in November 2003; the PROFS project was approved on July 12, 2004 with a time line beginning on October 01, 2004. The final outcome, to be delivered by the end of 2005, will be seven work packages and a final report including an executive summary.

2 Relevance to the work of IAMU

It is well reported that more than three in ten accidents occurring at sea or in ports can be attributed to communication deficiencies, primarily due to an insufficient command among seafarers or other maritime personnel of what is called Maritime English. As a result, the legal requirements regarding communicative competency, as mentioned above, have been considerably sharpened in recent years to promote safety at sea and in ports. Coincidentally, as the percentage of seafarers in the shipping industry shrinks and the number of internationally employed shore-based personnel increases, Maritime English has become an essential career tool, permitting mobility, flexibility and competitiveness.

The authors, having worked extensively in this field, have observed the rise in interest and concern of maritime organisations as to how they should best accommodate these new demands. Maritime Education and Training institutions, often reluctant to recognise Maritime English on an equal footing to Navigation or Marine Engineering, or to dedicate more instruction hours in an already tight programme, have been keen to find more effective strategies. Often this is attempted by paying little or no attention to the amorphous global body of Maritime English instructors at their disposal and the various qualifications and skills individual instructors possess, or do not possess, in meeting the legal requirements. Thus, the results and findings of this project, i.e. the guidelines and recommendations to be developed and suggested, should have a direct impact upon the urgently required improvement of the Maritime English communication competence of the graduates of maritime institutions via a solidly based professional profile of the instructors teaching navigational and marine engineering students at IAMU affiliated institutions.

3 Research questions

The key questions being considered by the PROFS project team are:

- What types of Maritime English instructors are currently employed at MET institutions? What is the usefulness and limitations of each type?
- What are the linguistic and methodical requirements of a “qualified” Maritime English instructor? How can these requirements be met?
- What is the minimum maritime background knowledge required? How can this be best acquired?
- What further qualification measures for Maritime English instructors in the maritime field and in language teaching/acquisition methodology can be identified?
- Which professional organisation or affiliation would best assist Maritime English instructors in meeting the requirements of STCW 1978/95?
- Is there a suitable body to oversee developments and advise IAMU on progress?

4 Methodology and preliminary observations

Both deductive and inductive reasoning processes were considered to be appropriate for this type of research. The deductive element consists primarily of academic desktop research based on the researchers’ own experience in combination with previous research, whereas the inductive element involves the evaluation of the response to a specially designed questionnaire, the evaluation of round-table discussions, personal interviews, and brainstorming sessions with

international MET students and graduates as well as with representatives of the maritime industry.

4.1 Deductive element

The deductive element, based on the team's collective experience and previous research, was largely arrived at in the papers noted in section 1 above and refined, with the third member of the team's inclusion (Pritchard), at the kick-off meeting in Warnemünde (September 29-30, 2004) and through follow-up communications.

4.1.1 Typology

The typology proposed for consideration includes 4 categories of Maritime English instructors typically employed at MET institutions, namely:

1. Career Specialists, recognised as they:
 - a. are Graduates/Qualified Teachers;
 - b. have become "marinated" – have seafaring credibility;
 - c. have a reasonable institutional standing;
 - d. may (or may not) be "qualified" to teach Maritime English.
2. English Language and Literature Graduates, recognised as they:
 - a. are lovers of English;
 - b. are not necessarily interested in applied linguistics;
 - c. prefer to teach general English;
 - d. are often asked to teach Maritime English but fail to meet the STCW standards.
3. Former Seafarers, recognised as they:
 - a. are technical experts but ...
 - i. not necessarily skilled at English;
 - ii. not necessarily skilled at teaching;
 - iii. often over-challenge their students.
 - b. could deliver technical subjects in English.
4. "Native" English Speaking Persons ("backpackers/nomads", housewives, spouses, retirees, etc), recognised as they:
 - a. are often employed to motivate students to listen/speak in English but...
 - i. not necessarily skilled at English;
 - ii. not necessarily skilled at teaching;
 - iii. rarely knowledgeable in maritime matters.

A fifth category has been considered, namely those instructors at MET institutions who are encouraged or ordered to use English (as a foreign language) when teaching technical subjects. Such persons are not regarded by the PROFS team as Maritime English instructors but are increasingly seen by management as a/the source of supplying students with the perceived dosage of Maritime English required. The team recognises that this approach could play a supporting role but has yet to see an institution providing a considered list of the intended learning outcomes, suggesting that standards have yet to be established. Instead, the team much prefers the so-called "twinning" approach (the essence of which

involves partnering technical subject instructors with Maritime English instructors). However, the temptation for institutional managers, in financially stretched situations, to do away with the Maritime English instructor altogether, hoping that the English competency of the remaining technical teaching staff will be sufficient compensation, cannot be ignored. The pros and cons of the “fifth category” and twinning will receive further attention in the Final Report.

4.2 Inductive element

The inductive element consisted of a specially designed questionnaire that was produced, trialled, amended and finalised during the first quarter of the project’s time frame. In addition, a discussion/interview paper was devised in much the same way for use at round-table discussions and during personal interviews. It is reassuring to note the respondents and participants have unanimously regarded the tenor and strategic aims of the questionnaire and round table discussions as appropriate, and the objectives as highly relevant for promoting/ensuring the quality of Maritime English instruction.

4.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained a brief introductory description of the aims of the Project, and four parts.

- Part 1: Ways to Maritime Background Knowledge - to be completed by Maritime English instructors
 - 4 subsections containing in total 16 “questions”
- Part 2: Ways to Maritime Background Knowledge - to be completed by mariners teaching or expecting to teach Maritime English
 - 4 subsections containing in total 10 “questions”
- Part 3: Maritime English Management - to be completed by managers responsible for, but not teaching, Maritime English
 - 4 subsections containing in total 17 “questions”
- Part 4. Opinion – to be completed by all respondents
 - 20 statements to be ranked on a scale from 1 (“strong no”) to 6 (“strong yes”)
- Room was provided for additional comments.

The questionnaire was distributed extensively throughout the world, primarily at meetings and conferences, through email and websites, as well as at maritime institutions and via personal contacts. Using such methods of distribution means that it is impossible to calculate the distribution/return ratio.

The end of the second quarter (March 31) marked the deadline for including the questionnaire responses into the statistical summary. At this point 129 responses had been received; the initial target of 100 replies, having been well surpassed, suggests that the outcome in general terms will be statistically representative. It should be noted, however, that the majority of respondents represented Maritime English instructors, 80%, with mariners teaching or expecting to teach Maritime English, and managers responsible for, but not teaching Maritime English, sharing equally the remaining 20%. Also worth noting, has been the limited response from IAMU members.

The task of collating and summarising the responses to the questionnaire was completed during the third quarter and the documentation (including the raw data) has been deposited with the IAMU Secretariat. At the time of writing an evaluation of the responses is underway and this will be reported and reflected upon in the deliverables and the final executive summary.

4.2.2 Structured round table discussions and interviews

The PROFS team members are fully aware that questionnaires do not always “tell the truth”. In order to offset this problem the team’s methodology has included structured round table discussions and personal interviews. The structural element has consisted of a specially designed, in-depth round-table question sheet for use on appropriate occasions during the first three quarters of the project period. Among others, three specific gatherings were targeted, giving most satisfactory results:

- the International Maritime English Conference IMEC16 (international but primarily Asian participation) held in Manila, Philippines, October 26-29, 2004;
- the mid-project team meeting at World Maritime University, Malmö, Sweden (international participation: MET Masters degree students), April 06, 2005;
- the IMO Maritime English Instructor’s Training Course, Szczecin, Poland, (eastern European participation), May 30-June 10, 2005.

Unfortunately none of the team was able to attend IAMU’s AGA5 in Tasmania, Australia, however, it is understood that at the team’s request an announcement was made to promote the project and the questionnaire was distributed.

The questions for discussion as presented in the question sheet reflect the project’s research questions and were as follows:

- What types of Maritime English instructors are currently employed at MET institutions? What is the usefulness and limitations of each type?
- How, based on your experience, can MET institutions improve Maritime English instruction?
- What is the minimum maritime background knowledge necessary for a Maritime English instructor to adequately perform his/her job? How can this be best acquired?
- Can/could a Maritime English instructor become “qualified”? If so, what are/would be the language and teaching requirements? How can these requirements be met?
- Which professional institution, organisation or affiliation would best assist Maritime English instructors in meeting the requirements of STCW 1978/95?

The task of recording and summarising the results of the round table discussions and personal interviews was completed during the third quarter and

the documentation (including the raw data) has been deposited with the IAMU Secretariat. At the time of writing an evaluation of the responses is underway and this will be reported and reflected upon in the deliverables and the final executive summary.

5 The AGA6 presentation

On the occasion of AGA6 the project will be nearing its completion. It is thus the intention of the team to report to the participants on the general progress and specific findings of the project whilst providing recommendations for the IAMU membership to consider. The completed research element (raw data) will become available to members only at the discretion of the IAMU Board.

6 Conclusion

The results of the research and the deliberations of the PROFS project team will be presented in eight deliverables (work packages) as follows:

- WP 0: Introduction to the project, including a description of the methodology employed.
- WP 1: Categorising the profiles of the various types of currently employed Maritime English (ME) instructors, clarifying the usefulness and limitations of each.
- WP 2: Identifying the linguistic and methodical requirements of a qualified ME instructor and the ways of meeting them.
- WP 3: Identifying the horizontal/vertical maritime background knowledge (scope/depth) to be expected of a ME instructor and the ways of acquiring such.
- WP 4: Identifying adequate, appropriate and practicable further qualification measures for ME instructors in the maritime field, in language teaching/acquisition methodology and course development.
- WP 5: Proposing an appropriate affiliation of the ME teaching staff within the structures of MET institutions in order to guarantee their involvement in the overall MET conception of the latter.
- WP 6: Proposing a suitable body to oversee developments and advise IAMU and other relevant authorities on progress and probably certify that the requirements of STCW 1978/95 & SOLAS 1992/02 are met.
- WP 7: Final report with executive summary.

The PROFS project will conclude by the end of 2005.

