



The Role of General English and Maritime English in Raising Cultural Awareness in the Students of Maritime Education and Training Institutions

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Abstract

The aim of the present work is to consider interconnection existing between intercultural communication, cultural awareness and the English language teaching, to find solution whether cultural elements should have been introduced in the language teaching with the purpose of increasing the effectiveness of the course. The aim of the paper is also to illustrate the importance of the English language for acquisition of cultural awareness on the level necessary for modern seafarers who often have to work in multinational crews. Since knowledge of common language is a core component in bringing people of different cultures together, establishing common friendly environment and common interests, role of General English and Maritime English is quite significant in teaching cultural specifics to people of different nationalities with various cultural background. Thus, the overall aim of the article is to bring facts to prove that integration of culture, increasing cultural awareness with purpose of facilitation of intercultural communication would contribute to communication between seafarers in multinational crews in modern maritime industry. The other issue raised in the paper is to find out whether culture should be taught as a separate subject or it can be integrated in Maritime English course or other humanities courses.

Review Article

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Cultural Awareness, General English, Maritime English, Multinational Crews

1. Introduction

Knowledge of the English language is one of the most important factors that stimulate raising level of Cultural Awareness (CA). It is particularly knowledge of General English (GE) that helps people with different cultural background to find something in common, especially when they are working in restricted environment e.g. work on board a vessel. Therefore, Maritime English (ME) course or other courses in humanities should include texts that will be aimed at erasing cultural barriers that exist between seafarers of different nationalities with various cultural background. These could be texts of

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educational character and even extracts from pieces of literature especially marine stories that can become common topics for discussion and speculations for seafarers when they are onboard ships.

The aim of the present work is to consider the interconnection existing between intercultural communication, cultural awareness and English language teaching, to find solution whether cultural elements should have been introduced in the language teaching with the purpose of increasing the effectiveness of the course and raising CA level in students of Maritime Education and Training Institutions (METIs). The aim of our paper is also to bring facts in order to prove the importance of the English language for acquisition of cultural awareness on the level that is necessary for modern seafarers who often have to work in multinational crews.

2. Literature Review

Culture is very important criteria in modern maritime world in which two thirds of the world's crews are represented by multinational crews. Cultural awareness is the very phenomenon that can be crucial in establishing good relations with people of different nationalities as it usually represents significant means to understand people's behavior and motivations for this behaviour. Knowledge of other cultures would contribute to seafarers' mutual understanding and development of good working environment on board ships.

Since, the topic of the present paper is role of General English and Maritime English in raising cultural awareness in the students of maritime education and training institutions, it would be expedient to speak about the notions of culture and cultural awareness mentioned in different works of scholars working on this issue.

Scollon and Scollon (1997) mention in their work *Intercultural Communication*:

By using anthropological sense of the word "culture" we mean to consider any aspect of the ideas, communications, or behaviours of a group of people which gives to them a distinctive identity and which is used to organize their intentional sense of cohesion and membership (p.127).

In her work *Tackling the Challenges of Multicultural Crewing Practices in the Shipping Industry* Hu (2017, p. 23) states as in the following:

The term "culture" refers to a complex set of constructs and three levels of culture can influence human performance in the work environment: national culture, professional culture and organizational culture. These should be dealt with under cultural awareness (p.55). The same author in the above-mentioned work also mentions that cultural awareness is a dynamic cognitive process involving a continuously evolving perception of the cultural elements embedded in encounters in culturally diverse environments within a time and space frame, the comprehension of their meaning, the projection of their status/consequences in the near future and the encoding of feedback into one's experience repository. In a dynamic and cooperative multicultural work setting, cultural awareness enables individuals to monitor the cultural related information surrounding their colleagues and the environment they are in, which provides a context for their own activities and for effective interaction. The functioning of cultural awareness should be facilitated and mediated by a "self" open to the cultural differences, so as to be conscious of and question how one's own national, professional and organizational cultures impact their values, beliefs, judgment and behaviors. The level of one's cultural awareness should be influenced

by a series of factors such as language skills, education and training experiences, international work experience, multicultural contact experience, etc.

It would also be relevant to mention three levels of culture: national, professional and organizational as offered by different scientists in Hu (2017, pp. 13-14) stating that:

Hofstede (2001) defines national culture as a collective mental programming or “software of the mind”, which embodies in a person’s patterns of thinking, feeling and potential acting that develops out of the social environment in which they grow up and live. Since much of the programming is acquired in early childhood, the stage at which a person is most susceptible to learning and assimilating, it would be difficult for individuals to change or unlearn their culture before being able to learn or be programmed in another way. Professional culture, developed and transmitted across a certain occupational group, makes an important impact on the values, attitudes, and norms of the group members, and is as important as national culture in shaping a person's attitudes and behaviors (Kitada, 2010). Organizational culture is strongly influenced by professional culture (Hofstede, 1991). Considering the three levels of culture in the work environment, to develop cultural awareness requires an understanding of one’s own and one’s colleagues’ national (or social) cultures, and the professional and organizational cultures one finds themselves in.

Although Cultural Awareness is a separate phenomenon of sociological character, it is approached in this paper from linguistic point of view i.e. from the viewpoint of the English Language, both General English and Maritime English. In the present work I am going to consider the English Language and its mastering as a tool for raising cultural awareness in the students of Maritime Education and Training Institutions.

According to Hu (2017, p. 56):

Four influencing factors are identified and proposed as impacting on the formation and improvement of cultural awareness, namely: educational/training experience, language skills, international work experience and diverse social contact.

Knowledge of common language is a core component in bringing people of different cultures together, establishing common friendly environment and common interests. Therefore, role of General English and Maritime English is quite significant in teaching cultural specifics to people of different nationalities with different cultural backgrounds and in this respect teaching such subjects as history, religion, culture and even pieces of literature within humanities courses could become crucial for formation of mind of the future seafarer. In this connection, interconnection between knowledge of English and cultural awareness resulting in successful intercultural communication is perfectly seen in the statement of Hu (2017, p. 29) as follows:

Limited language comprehension and fluency may create a sense of remoteness, disconnectedness and even frustration, which can exclude individuals from each other and from opportunities for interaction in both working and social contexts (Earley & Ang (2003). In contrast, individuals with superior language skills should be better at validating assumptions about behaviors that reflect different cultural practices.

Multinational and multicultural working environment in modern fleet make specialists of maritime field think about necessity of integrating teaching of elements of culture in Maritime English course. The purpose of this integration is facilitation of communication between seafarers of different nationalities and cultures. The aim of the present work is to offer the solution to this issue to find out whether integration of culture, increasing cultural awareness with purpose of facilitation of intercultural communication would contribute to communication between seafarers in multinational crews as it is the question of utmost importance in modern maritime industry.

Such measures are important nowadays as modern maritime industry with its international fleet differs greatly from what it was before mid-80s of XX century. According to Hu (2017, p. 2):

The employment of multinational crews has become widespread since the 1980s. This practice brought a number of problems in communication, including cultural misunderstanding among crew on board as it was criticized as one of the major causes of marine accidents (p. iv). The industry appears unready to cope with manning diversity and is incapable of balancing the advantages with the risks of mixed crews. Cultural complexity on ships has recently become an issue of intensive attention, due to the fact that a growing number of maritime accidents are attributed to ineffective communication and misinterpretation of different behaviors on multilingual and multicultural vessels.

The significance of intercultural communication was also underlined by Scollon and Scollon (1997) in their work *Intercultural Communication* stating that:

Intercultural communication is a central aspect of the work life of anyone whose work is based upon communication. (p.4)

The issue of intercultural communication is of special significance in maritime context. Thus, the role of teaching cultural specifics to people of different nationalities with different cultural background that includes teaching humanities, such subjects as history, religion, culture; even pieces of literature should be integrated in curricula of maritime education and training institutions. If subjects like history, history of world religions, etc. the above-mentioned fiction are integrated in the curricula of Maritime Education and Training Institutions (METIs) of different maritime nations, this would be the basis for formation of common model of seafarers of the future with increased cultural awareness (CA) and consequently skills of intercultural communication. In this way it will be easier to form the model and reach the level of Global Maritime Professional (GMP) offered in Body of Knowledge (2019), developed by Nippon Foundation and International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU):

Working Description of Global Maritime Professional

An individual who is a professional in the maritime industry and who is equipped with all the relevant technical competences relevant to their specific operational role in the industry and who – in addition to their technical competency – exhibits a high level of professionalism and ethical behaviour, human relations skills, emotional intelligence and multicultural awareness and sensitivity. Such an individual exhibits significant leadership skill and is able to optimally work with teams and also take personal initiative. They additionally display a high sense of environmental awareness and an excellent grasp of contemporary issues affecting the maritime industry. (p.129)

This working description of global maritime professional underlines such phenomena as multicultural awareness and sensitivity. These two attributes of GMP are the subject I try to address in the present paper.

3. Recommendations

Similar to other scholars, I think that cultural aspects could be studied within different subjects or one separate subject can be added that would include topics on history, religion, pieces of fiction and other issues that would unite seafarers and create common basis for them. That would help them in establishing proper intercultural communication when on board a ship. If General English and Maritime English courses contain some of the topics on elementary level, it would be possible to offer more detailed versions of the same topics and add some more information related to cultural aspects in later years of studies.

The other issue that requires solution is whether culture should be taught as a separate subject or it can be integrated in Maritime English course or some other courses in humanities taught at Maritime Education and Training institutions. The topics or courses on cultural awareness, intercultural communication should be integrated in the curricula of maritime higher educational institutions with explicit objectives and outcomes. They can be integrated into different educational courses like Maritime English, History, etc, and even a separate subject that would cover all necessary topics, could be created with consequent drawing up the corresponding model course.

The objectives of such draft course could be formulated in the following way:

- To contribute to raising the knowledge of students of METIs in the history of other maritime nations and their cultures;
- To bring up the students of METIs in spirit of mutual politeness towards other nations, in this way developing internationalism in future seafarers;
- To apply the gained knowledge in preparing students to correspond to the model of Global Maritime Professional (GMP).
- To develop the knowledge of General English and Maritime English up to the level necessary to reach the above-mentioned objectives stated in the course.

The outcomes of the course can be formulated as following:

- The students of METIs and, consequently, the graduates have gained wide knowledge on history, religions and traditions of different maritime nations;
- The knowledge the students have gained develops the sense of mutual respect towards each other's nations in them, the factor that has to ensure politeness among seafarers when they will be working in multinational crews;
- The course aimed at raising cultural awareness of students of METIs has resulted in formation of seafarers who in their professionalism, views and adaptability approach the model of Global Maritime Professional.
- The students have received the knowledge of the English language on the level sufficient to cover all the topics, courses and subjects that are necessary to raise the level of cultural awareness in the future seafarers.

As it is clear from the objectives and outcomes stated above, the issue of integration CA element into METIs curricula should be of interest for shipping companies, governments of maritime nations and also governed by international bodies of maritime field like International Maritime Organization (IMO). Certain model courses should be created and existing model courses should be modified. Shipping

companies should order incorporation of these courses in curricula of Maritime Education and Training Institutions as it would contribute to improvement of intercultural communication, the factor that is crucial for successful functioning of maritime industry.

The English language is “lingua franca” of maritime field and 80% of accidents at sea are caused by human factor or miscommunication, that is in its turn dependent on two main components: knowledge of the English language i.e. Maritime English and degree of cultural awareness common to seafarers working in the international fleet. Hu (2017) cited Rehman (2007) who called for close cooperation between the International Maritime Organization (IMO), shipping industry and maritime education and training (MET) institutions to provide quality training in English language and culture differences to help eliminate the communication barriers among crew members (p. 5). In this connection Hu (2017) also mentions as follows:

It would be fair to argue that cultural awareness in the maritime context should cover an understanding of the variances existing among different national cultures that influence the way risk and safety are perceived. The current professional characteristics of seafaring may intensify these differences and cause problems, and good organizational culture by the shipping company plays an important role in accommodating the national differences and encouraging all parties concerned to strive for safety culture as a common goal. (pp.16-17)

In the foreword of IMO SMCP (2002) it is stated that the IMO SMCP was adopted by the Assembly at IMO in November 2001 as resolution A.918(22) (p, III). I consider Standard Marine Phrases (SMCP) to be one of the first significant steps of linguistic character to erasing language barriers among seafarers of different nationalities with different cultural background who have to work in multinational crews, this is also significant step that was taken towards facilitation of communication and reducing accidents at sea.

Since, in the present paper the English language, both General English and Maritime English, is considered to be important means for raising CA in students of METIs, it is time to think how to improve knowledge of seafarers’ English and, simultaneously, what should be done to raise CA in students of maritime education and training institutions. Improving language skills would contribute to better application of professional culture and organizational culture. At the same time, subjects proposed to be studied at METIs would contribute to seafarers’ knowledge of each other’s national culture including such aspect as religions would raise respect towards each other’s national culture. That would contribute to establishment of good relationship on board ship and thus increasing work performance and avoiding accidents. According to Hu (2017):

The positive relationship between the influencing factor of language skills with cultural awareness score supports the argument that good command of English language enables people to better obtain cultural knowledge and cultural nuances in cross-cultural situations. It suggests the necessity to make efforts to improve the seafarers’ command of the English language, in general, to augment their overall cultural awareness. (pp. 42-43)

Special attention should be paid to correct organization of language studies at METIs in order to augment the level of CA in students of maritime education and training institutions. Integration of texts with information about culture (as it has already been mentioned culture is implied in anthropological sense in this article) into General and Maritime English courses, teaching elements of world history, history of world religions within different courses in humanities that could be integrated into curricula at METIs all over the world.

Recommendations given in the present article concern mainly students of METIs, but as for educating the acting seafarers in cultural awareness in order to ensure successful intercultural communication on board ship, it would be effective to conduct special courses on history, religion, cultural values and traditions at Maritime Training Centers (MTC) where they can receive specific training in the above-mentioned issues depending on the nationalities they will work with in the particular upcoming voyage. Such courses will be effective and possible if seafarers have information regarding ethnic and national background of the crew beforehand. It is not only ordinary language skills but information gained about culture, history and religion of seafarers from another countries, gained through various sources including world wide web that would help to raise mutual understanding among seafarers on board ships, in raising CA and mutual respect in the whole seafarers' community. Thus, as the time for preparing acting seafarers in MTCs is rather limited, it would be an advantage if trainees (seafarers) at MTCs receive information about history, religions and traditions only of the nations, they are to work with during upcoming voyage. In this respect I would like to refer to the words of Hu (2017), who mentions:

Language competency and sufficient culturally related education/training play an important role in the improvement of seafarers' cultural awareness. The increasing number of maritime accidents attributed to cultural or communication barriers further highlights the risks of mixed crewing and the urgency for a provision of training courses for cultural awareness for seafarers (pp.44-46). And finally, she recommends to Cooperate with MET institutions and provide short courses about cultural issues for crewmembers prior to each voyage onboard vessels. (p. 53)

4. Discussion

The issue of CA is quite significant issue of maritime field as it becomes frequent subject of research and the necessity of its integrating in METIs curricula has been raised and its effect has been widely studied by different researchers of Maritime English and of Maritime field in general. A lot of Maritime English researchers as well as researchers of Maritime field (Maritime Education and Training) find it necessary to raise cultural awareness in students of METIs and are searching the most effective ways for implementation of these goals. In this respect, role of the knowledge of General English as well as of Maritime English is of tremendous importance as it is a guarantee that students will be able to acquire different materials aimed at raising CA. At the same time knowledge of the English language is a tool that ensures that all seafarers irrespective of their nationalities and cultural backgrounds will have something in common when working in common environment on board ships.

My proposal is that first of all elementary texts on some information e.g. about English-speaking countries like Great Britain, USA, their capitals and main cities like London, New York, etc. is given within GE course. Later, when future seafarers study Maritime English directly related to their future specialties (Navigation, Marine Engineering, Electrical Engineering, etc.) information on different cultural issues: history, religion, cultural habits, national and religious holidays should be integrated in corresponding courses or even should be formed into separate subjects like: World History, World Religions, etc. On later stage of studies pieces of marine stories and extracts from marine novels can be integrated in Maritime English course in the form of supplementary tasks or as home reading materials to be worked on by the students during vacations. Cultural awareness can be reached following the recommendations given by Markoe (2012) who suggests to include foreign languages and literature in the curriculum; choose texts that include readings from many cultures, especially to those that will be unfamiliar to most undergraduates; teach the basics of the world's great religions in the humanities courses that are required for future merchant mariners; make visits to museums and concert halls a regular

part of the curriculum, especially to those institutions that emphasize the music and art beyond the borders of the nation (p.7).

Thus, according to my proposal and the discussion offered in the present paper, the following changes to be made to the curricula and the following measures to be taken in order to augment CA in the students of METIs:

- To integrate informative texts of universal character on general topics that would correspond to GE level A1, A2;
- To teach history, religion, etc. in order to widen the scope of thinking of the METIs students and offer such courses within ME course, that would correspond to A2, B1 level;
- To integrate extracts from marine stories and novels in syllabi of ME course that would correspond to B1, B2 level. This component could be integrated in the syllabi of ME in the form of Home Reading;
- To ensure real or virtual visits to the national museums of different countries, maritime museums in order to teach history, culture and maritime history of different nations to METIs students.

All these will lead to acquisition of internationalism among students that can be compared to international work experience among adults. In its turn a variety of international work experiences offer individuals occasions to retrieve their prior knowledge of cultures (values, beliefs, and norms) and prior experience of intercultural collaborative work, practice their cultural awareness, question their own cultural assumptions, think about cultural preferences, analyze other cultural norms, negotiate their roles and responsibilities before and during interactions for cooperative purposes, and encode the feedback as additional knowledge to assist their cross-cultural interaction in the future (Hu 2017, p.31).

Van Dyne as cited by Hu (2017), states that richer cultural knowledge decreases the uncertainty about how to behave and anxiety about doing the right things, which may easily result in cognitive simplicity and eventually behavioral inflexibility and lower-quality interactions (Van Dyne & Ang, 2015) This would be extremely true for seafarers who are working in a confined space and within a group of colleagues they can hardly avoid in and off work (p.29). Scollon and Scollon (1997) state:

Where two people have very similar histories, background, and experiences, their communication works fairly easily because the inferences each makes about what the other means will be based on common experience and knowledge. (pp.11-12)

The steps offered in the present paper will lead to the development of global mindset and approaching the phenomenon of Global Maritime Professional, as a model of universal seafarer offered for modern maritime industry.

Cultural awareness and finding ways of raising CA will also contribute to social dynamics on board ship. CA being the part of this social issue significant for work in maritime industry will help in coping with other issues that influence social dynamics like gender, age, hierarchy, linguistic differences and problems that arise on board a ship due to these differences, etc.

The actuality of the topic of the present paper is conditioned by the demands of contemporary maritime industry and international documents that regulate functioning of the maritime industry as a whole, such as IMO Conventions and Codes, STCW Convention and Code, ISM Code in particular.

The STCW 95 Convention as amended and ISM code have brief requirements related to effective communication among officers on watch/ship personnel, which could be regarded as a concern to address the possible safety threats associated with recruitment practices of mixed crew. It is recommended that the communicative competence in the STCW convention or definition of safe manning in the ISM code should be supplemented with more specific references to cultural awareness. In connection with this a well-known researcher and specialist of Maritime English Pritchard (2004) in his article A Databank of Maritime English Resources—an Invitation for Contributors that especially in view of new STCW competencies, MET programs must concentrate on the interface between humans in relation to communication between crew members by enhancing general knowledge in English together with socio-cultural aspects of the multicultural environment.

In order to prove the importance of CA I would like to refer to the words of Hu (2017) who says:

The education process may start from the provision of essential and practical knowledge about various layers of the notion of culture relevant to seafarers working in culturally mixed environments, namely national cultures, seafaring professional culture, organizational culture and safety culture. This would serve as a basis for students to understand and accept that even though the shipping industry is international by nature, seafarers are still divided by barriers of culture, language, role, skills, wage levels and the like (Precious (1997) p.123), and the differences need to be respected for successful cooperation and collaboration to happen. (pp.48-49)

Thus, all measures to be taken to augment CA in the future seafarers are aimed at reaching the following goal: to widen thinking limits of the future seafarer with consequent aim of forming global mindset in seafarers occupied in multinational crews. Earley, Murnieks, & Mosakowski (2007), as cited by Hu (2017), mention:

Having a global mindset requires the possession of six personal characteristics: knowledge (broad and deep), conceptualization (ability to deal with complexity), flexibility (ability to adjust to global and local demands), sensitivity (for cultural diversity), judgment (ability to intuit decisions with inadequate information) and reflection” (seeking continuous improvement) (Earley et al, 2007). (pp.19-20)

In the present work I tried to offer recommendations in the form of measures and steps to be taken for the development of some of the above-mentioned qualities (knowledge, sensitivity) in the future seafarers. Reaching the global mindset in its turn would be a step towards formation of GMP, the phenomenon mentioned above in the present paper and will also help to reach worldwide harmonization of mental programs (Hofstede (1991), that is so necessary in modern globalized maritime industry.

According to Hu (2017, p.57):

The recommended measures include the provision of courses in cultural awareness; more emphasis on General English skill teaching; the adoption of innovative student-centered, constructivist ways of teaching; the promotion of cultural sensitivity management on board ships; and the proactive role taken by IMO through the development of a CA model course and the re-examination of the concept of safe manning to include cultural considerations in the relevant international regulatory instruments, such as the STCW Convention and Code and the ISM Code.

Increasing cultural awareness in the future seafarers will lead to mutual respect to the history, religions, languages and traditions of different countries and will contribute to the development of politeness in seafarers' relationships as politeness is the concept adjacent to awareness. This will lead to polite attitude which will help in creating friendly atmosphere and mutual understanding, more effective communication and, consequently, collaboration among seafarers on board ships. It will inevitably result in decreasing the number of accidents at sea due to human factor that, in its turn, is caused by human and linguistic misunderstandings.

5. Conclusion

As the aim of the present work is to consider the interconnection existing between intercultural communication, cultural awareness and English language teaching and to illustrate the importance of the English language for acquisition CA on the level necessary for modern seafarers who often have to work in multinational crews I have come to the following conclusions:

- Proper knowledge of the English language is very important to integrate texts on cultural issues in GE and ME courses.
- The English language is the basis for studies of subjects like history, religion, etc. as most of the materials to raise CA are given in English.
- The English language is the basis for reading marine stories or extracts from marine novels, quite efficient way to raise CA and form common interests among future seafarers.

Knowledge of Maritime English irrespective of its specifics is also the basis for creating common ground for seafarers. Tools like knowledge of specific terminology, international terminology, knowledge of common field unites people working at sea. There are several factors that can be used as motivation for reaching successful intercultural communication among seafarers. One of them is common goal they all have during their work on board a ship – to operate the ship properly and to ensure safety on board a vessel. This goal is common to all seafarers irrespective of their nationalities and cultural backgrounds.

In the article I have stated the objectives and outcomes of the subject to be integrated into curricula of METIs to raise CA in future seafarers. All these measures would contribute to raising CA in the students of METI's and will help them approach the model of Global Maritime Professional that is the subject of research in modern maritime industry. They are necessary in order to ensure that graduates of METIs – the future seafarers reach necessary level of CA that will help them to establish good communication on board and this could become a guarantee of high-performance, avoiding conflicts and consequently reducing risks.

Supporting the idea of integrating teaching culture and humanities in the scope of Maritime English course and other subjects at Maritime Education and Training institutions, I think special courses devoted to cultural aspects should be developed and corresponding model courses should be drawn up at IMO. As this issue represents controversial subject of discussion within maritime community, the research on Cultural Awareness and Intercultural Communication as means of facilitation of communication through English Language in maritime field, proving the importance of English in reaching this goal underline the necessity to take measures in this direction and find ways for implementation of this plan/project.

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