

# PRACTISING MARITIME ENGLISH VOCABULARY AND DEVELOPING ACCURACY THROUGH 'THE WALL DICTATION'

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## Abstract

With more and more multi-lingual and multicultural crews joining the transnational seafarers' maritime community, their competence in maritime English (Maritime ESP) becomes a public concern. There is a need for maritime English lecturers to use some effective techniques in teaching maritime English vocabulary so that students can master it well. The presentation of new vocabulary should be followed up immediately with controlled practice. 'Wall Dictation' is suggested since it not only can be used for practising vocabularies but also can be used for developing accuracy which leads to clear communication.

Keywords: maritime English vocabulary; accuracy; dictation

## Introduction

International shipping is growing rapidly, with multi-cultural crews speaking English as an International language, and thus effective communication onboard and between ship and shore is essential. Meanwhile it goes without saying within the shipping industry, that, whenever the 'international maritime language' is referred to, maritime English is meant. According to the STCW 1978/95, future deck and engineer officers have to render a well developed command of this specialized language, otherwise they will not be granted a certificate of competence as a great many accidents at sea and ports use to happen due to communication deficiencies. Maritime English, the language of the sea, is needed in today's shipping industry. The demands for competent seafarers require

their proficiency in understanding and using Maritime English.

Maritime English is a career tool, and has led to a growing academic area of study, thus, some Maritime Training Institutions have found it necessary to develop effective training strategies which meet these demands. Most of Maritime Training Institutions are aware that mastering communication skill is one of the important components which ensure the safety at sea. In order to cultivate the high quality seafarers, maritime English lecturers should focus on teaching the practical terminology and communication skills that include listening, speaking, reading, writing as required by IMO conventions in the international shipping industry and they should find the effective ways to teach the language.

This paper is aimed at maritime English teaching with focus on how to do controlled practice in maritime English vocabulary and develop accuracy at the same time effectively using *wall dictation*.

### **Maritime English Vocabulary**

Vocabulary is the knowledge of word meaning. As Steven Stahl (2005) puts it 'Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world.'. Vocabulary knowledge is not something that can ever be fully mastered; it is something that expands and deepens over the course of a lifetime. Instruction in vocabulary involves far more than looking up words in a dictionary and using the words in a sentence.

Vocabulary is acquired incidentally through indirect exposure to words and intentionally through explicit instruction in a specific word and word-learning strategy. According to Michael Graves (2000), there are four components of an effective vocabulary program: (1) wide or extensive independent reading to expand word knowledge; (2) instruction in specific words to enhance comprehension of text containing those words; (3) instruction in independent word-learning strategies, and (4) word

consciousness and word-play activities to motivate and enhance learning. -Referring to those components the writer thinks that lecturers of maritime English should be very creative so that students are able to use the words in communication.

### **Developing Accuracy**

Accuracy is the ability to produce correct sentences using correct grammar and vocabulary. The term accuracy relates to correct use of linguistic structures (grammatical accuracy), appropriate use of register (sociolinguistic accuracy) precision of vocabulary (semantic accuracy), and proper use of cohesive devices (rhetorical accuracy) (Omaggio, 1986).

Accuracy-focused tasks are usually controlled tasks that require students to produce language correctly, the emphasis being on minimizing errors rather than on spontaneous speaking. Although accuracy tasks are not authentic communication tasks, they play a crucial role in consolidating new language for students. They are necessary for giving students the confidence they need to use language that they have just acquired as well as for ensuring that they are able to produce new forms correctly. Use controlled and semi-controlled accuracy exercises to encourage shy students to speak. Students of

every level can benefit from controlled accuracy exercises that draw attention to specific areas of difficulty or common errors.

### **Dictation**

Dictation is an activity to write down something that someone says or reads out as it is being said or immediately after it is said. The use of dictation as one of the favourite language teaching and learning methodologies has gone through a long history. The dictation with the broadest learning possibilities is 'orthographic text dictation, in which students transcribe a unified passage. This is a classic dictation exercise in which students reinforce the spelling and sound correlation of English, uncover comprehension and grammatical weaknesses in learners for the teacher to analyze and discuss in future lesson' (Alure, 2002).

### **Discussion**

Specialist vocabulary is one of the main differences between teaching English for General Purposes and English for Specific Purposes. While it is crucial to teach specialist maritime vocabulary, this needs to be balanced with other areas of language systems and skills practice, as it is stated in the IMO Model Course 3.17 that teaching vocabulary is not just a case of having the

students write or repeat lists of isolated words. 'Knowing a word is like being able to use grammar. The students need to: (1) understand the context of the new item; (2) know the part of speech and how the word changes form; (3) be able to produce the word accurately (in terms of correct spelling and pronunciation); (4) know which other words collocate or 'go with' the new word; (5) differentiate between 'specialist' and 'general' meanings of words which can be used in several contexts; (6) be aware of the register of the word (e.g. formal/neutral/casual; maritime/general); (7) be able to remember the word when it is needed.

The last point refers to the difference between passive and active vocabulary. Passive vocabulary means the language items that the student has 'stored; in his memory: although he/she may recognize the word when reading or listening, he/she cannot recall or produce it in his/her own communications. Active vocabulary means that the student knows the word and can use it freely and appropriately in his/her speech and writing (IMO Model Course 3.17. 2000).

Students learn new vocabulary in two stages. First, when they read or hear new words, they know about the word and can usually recognize it, but they are not yet ready to use it in speech or writing. Later, when they

start to use the word, it becomes part of their active vocabulary. When lecturers present new vocabulary, they need to teach students what the word means, its pronunciation and how to use the word. Students, then, need lots of practice with new vocabulary in order to remember and use the new words. If teachers use different kinds of practice activities, then both lecturers and students can benefit from the variety. Controlled practice should let the students use the new words for communicative purposes with clear contexts. This allows the lecturers to check the students' understanding of the new items and help them consolidate the meaning of the new word, making it more likely that it will enter their active vocabulary store.

According to R. Montalvan (1990), there are "at least 20 advantages of dictation, and the most important are: (1) dictation can help develop all four language skill in an integrated way; (2) it can help learn grammar; (3) it helps to develop short-term memory; (4) practice in careful listening to a speaker will be useful to learners in the future in the note taking activities, for instance, listening to lectures; 5) dictation fosters unconscious thinking in the new language; (6) correction can be done by the students' peer correction of written dictation leads to oral communication". Despite its benefit, currently dictation is not

widely used in teaching English mainly because some language practitioners consider it teacher-centered and old-fashioned.

Traditionally, lecturers dictate while students write in silence but there are other student-led variations which focus on the vocabulary teaching and students' attention on the accuracy of their spoken English. 'Teachers can make use of different genre and a number of dictation activities to conduct their lessons so as to change a boring, threatening and stressful classroom atmosphere into a relaxing, supportive and enjoyable learning environment, which subsequently brings a positive influence on learners' performance '(David and Rinvolutri, 1988).

One of the relaxing, supportive and enjoyable learning techniques that the writer suggests in this paper is 'Wall Dictation'. For this activity clear instructions should be given before the start of the activity so that students understand what they are going to do. These are some stages to do wall dictation(1) warming up; (2) prepare a short text; (3) stick a few copies on to one wall of the classroom; (4) put the students into pairs; (5) ask each student A to sit at opposite end of the room; (6) each student B must go to the wall, read a section of the text, memorize it, run back to

his/her partner and dictate it to him/her; (7) while Student A writes, Student B returns to the text to memorize the next phrase and so on; (8) the winners are the pair who complete the dictation first with the least errors; (9) to make sure that each partner gets a chance to dictate, tell the pairs to swap when they reach a designated point on the text; (10) once the students have the text completed, they should exploit further so that they can do their self-correction.

With the emphasis on vocabulary practising and accuracy developing, the activity described above is especially useful for Maritime English teaching. The wall dictation involves all students and replicates the need for clear communication. The students who write need to listen closely and check what he/she hears, while the speaker needs to concentrate on accuracy of pronunciation and correct any written errors at the end of the task. There are some benefits we get by doing this wall dictation activity. Firstly, there is a value of encouraging students to develop their short-term memories in the maritime English vocabulary. Secondly, the process of doing dictation effectively requires students to group individual sounds and words into cohesive, meaningful chunks. Thirdly, which the writer considers to be the most important is that by doing the wall

dictation activity, the process of teaching maritime English vocabulary is fun, enjoyable and communicative.

### **Conclusion**

Wall dictation is a useful activity, lecturers in Maritime Training Institution can use it in maritime English class since teaching vocabulary is not just a case of having the students write or repeat lists of isolated words. If it is linked carefully to the rest of the lesson, students will enjoy it. By doing wall dictation, students not only learn and practice vocabulary in a fun environment but at the same time they can develop their language accuracy. Regular exposure to words that have been taught is essential for ensuring that passive vocabulary becomes active.

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