# Intercultural Dialogicity in Maritime English Course Materials

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## Abstract

This paper explores how intercultural awareness is raised in Maritime English (henceforth, ME) higher education courses and, particularly, how the "intercultural dialogue" (Council of Europe, 2008) is fostered in ME materials. Interculturality and its impact upon the maritime profession is a major concern for the shipping industry as multilingual and multicultural crews prevail aboard ships. Four teaching/learning resources have been targeted: the latest ME textbook (Grice, 2012), a web-based ME learning tool (MarEng, 2007-2010), a recently launched online platform offering ME learning materials (SeaTALK, 2015), and the latest edition of a full Model Course programme on ME (IMO, 2015). The results obtained help to assess if, and to what extent ME language teaching materials serve as "mediators of intercultural communicative competence" (Rico Troncoso, 2012: 130), providers of intercultural awareness, facilitators for intercultural encounters and creators of "spaces for intercultural dialogue" (Council of Europe, 2008: 46). Conclusions are expected to further research into intercultural dialogicity and provide researchers in other languages and ESP fields with guidance for assessing the presence of intercultural-related features in their own course materials.

## 1  Introduction

Following Basturkmen (2013: 2), English for Specific Purposes is "an 'interface' discipline" that subsumes three areas of enquiry: teaching, discourse and culture. The study of these three areas have so far adopted a conventional focus of enquiry but it is possible to extend their "traditional perimeters of enquiry" (page 7) beyond their borders and move beyond "by focusing research on the interfaces between teaching, discourse and culture" (page 7). This study is precisely focused on the interface between teaching and culture because it examines the construct of interculturality in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses and it particularly explores Maritime English (ME) learning and teaching materials from the point of view of "intercultural dialogue". This construct, first put forward by the Council of Europe in 2008, is discussed in the first section of this work with particular attention to the

maritime context because the shipping industry features a global, and hence, multicultural and multilingual business; therefore, the impact of interculturality is a major concern. Then, some studies dealing with interculturality and textbooks are briefly reviewed in Section 3. Section 4 explains the methodology used: it presents the study aims and the four target materials under analysis, and provides information on the intercultural competence criteria used for the assessment of the materials. Last, the main findings are discussed and some concluding remarks are added.

## 2  The Intercultural Dialogue and the Maritime Context

The *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* was launched by the Council of Europe Ministers of Foreign Affairs at their 118th Ministerial session held in Strasbourg, on May 7 2008. It defines "intercultural dialogue" as:

> (…) an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect (…) It operates at all levels – within societies, between the societies of Europe and between Europe and the wider world. (Council of Europe, 2008: 10-11)

For the White Paper, the difficulty in communicating in several languages stands out as one of the barriers to intercultural dialogue and to conducting intercultural conversations. Intercultural dialogue is supported by the development of competences, and these "are not automatically acquired" but "need to be learned, practised and maintained throughout life" (Council of Europe, 2008: 29). Language learning (at any education level and in either formal or non-formal learning) has an important role to play here, particularly "to avoid stereotyping individuals, to develop curiosity and openness to otherness and to discover other cultures" (Council of Europe, 2008: 29). Language classrooms can serve as "spaces for intercultural dialogue" (Council of Europe, 2008: 46) and learning materials can function as instruments that raise intercultural awareness and strengthen the intercultural dialogue on the basis of objectivity, critical analysis and multiperspectivity. In line with this, ESP classrooms and ESP learning materials are fundamental for the construction of intercultural dialogue in a culturally diverse profession.

Interculturality and its impact upon the maritime profession is a major concern for the shipping industry: the transport of goods by sea is a global business which reaches almost any part of the world and employs professionals from many language and cultural backgrounds. As such, it is known to be a multinational, multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural industry that is largely dependent upon successful intercultural communication. Reports investigating safety at sea provide a large number of examples that show how language misunderstandings and/or cultural differences have given rise to both major and minor accidents and put the vessel, the people on board and the environment at stake (European Commission, 1999; Bocanegra-Valle, 2013).

With this background, the MARCOM project (European Commission, 1999) stands out as the first worldwide attempt to cover the intercultural component as a teaching element in ME courses. MARCOM, which stands for MARitime COMmunication, is a project developed for the European Commission by a number of European professionals and ME teachers. It was financed by the Directorate General VII (Waterborne Transport) and coordinated by the Seafarers' International Research Centre at the University of Cardiff. For MARCOM, the relevance of interculturality in the shipping industry is unquestionable:

> Cultural differences have become particularly apposite in the high diversity of groups on board a modern vessel. There are no longer the tacit rules of behaviour which once guided the more homogeneous crews. When for example a traditionally crewed vessel was at sea, with say a British crew, there were ways to avoid friction. Certain topics were

generally avoided in the messroom and saloon such as politics and religion. Conversations would centre on safe subjects including sport, sex, music, the next port, the last ship and occasionally between friends, their home concerns. On mixed crew vessels there may not be a community of interests in even safe subjects except within small groups which congregate to talk in their own language. Similarly, when there are frictions and grievances the seafarers have to explain these to others in a language which is not their own. (European Commission, 1999: 7)

For Aronson et al. (2005: 16) "intercultural awareness" comprises: "(1) knowledge of the effects of culture on the beliefs and behaviors of others; (2) awareness of one's own cultural attributes and biases and their impact on others; and (3) understanding the impact of sociopolitical, environmental and economic context of others". Thus, and rephrasing these authors, intercultural awareness in a maritime setting requires the knowledge and interpersonal skills that allow shipping professionals to understand, appreciate and work with individuals from cultures other than their own. Moreover, intercultural awareness involves an awareness of multi-ethnic/cultural crews, acceptance of cultural differences, a degree of self-awareness, knowledge of the crewmember's culture and the adaptation of skills.

# 3   Interculturality and Textbooks

There have been some recent attempts to study the presence of intercultural issues in teaching/learning textbooks. As a way of example:

-   Alexopoulou and Lugo Mirón (2012) explore the concept of interculturality and how it has been jointly approached under the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) and the Cervantes Institute in virtue of its "Curricular Planning for the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language". They investigate the contribution of two textbooks to the promotion of intercultural competence among learners of Spanish for tourism and hotel management, and Spanish for professional purposes.

-   Lario de Oñate and Vázquez Amador (2013) examine the role that the intercultural component has played in Business English textbooks since the 1960s and to what extent such textbooks have promoted the development of intercultural competence among Business English learners.

-   The intercultural component as implemented in the textbooks of French for tourism is the object of Berlanga de Jesús' (2015) and Álvarez González's (in press) works.

-   Last, Bocanegra-Valle (2015a) assesses how intercultural competence is addressed in ten textbooks dealing with ten different ESP fields.

Intercultural awareness in the ME classroom has been the object of prior investigation (Bocanegra-Valle, 2015b); however, and to the best of my knowledge, interculturality and ME materials are two issues which have not been studied yet. This work is, thus, unique for three main reasons:

-   it embraces teaching/learning materials other than simply textbooks;

-   such materials are key in ME language classrooms around the world (not just Spanish ME classrooms) and are widely known among ME teachers and researchers; and, last,

-   it focuses solely on ME, a rather under-researched ESP field.

# 4  Methodology

This section describes the study aims and the target materials under analysis. It also provides details about the assessment criteria used for the evaluation of intercultural competence in the target materials.

## 4.1  Aims

This study pursues the following aims:

- to further the research into intercultural dialogicity as it may take place within LSP contexts;

- to explore the intercultural education opportunities that may be implemented in today's ME classrooms;

- to assess the extent to which ME language teaching materials serve as "mediators of intercultural communicative competence" (Rico Troncoso, 2012: 130);

- to explore present ways thanks to which materials may serve as providers of intercultural awareness, facilitators of intercultural encounters and creators of "spaces for intercultural dialogue" (Council of Europe, 2008: 46); and,

- to provide researchers in other languages and ESP fields with guidance for assessing the presence of intercultural-related features in their own course materials.

## 4.2  Materials

For the purposes of this paper, four teaching/learning resources have been targeted: a textbook, a web-based learning tool, an online platform containing learning materials, and a Model Course programme for teaching ME.

"Materials" may be defined as "anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of a language including coursebooks, videos, graded readers, flash cards, games, websites and mobile phone interactions" (Tomlinson, 2012: 143). In this line, the target materials in this study are the following:

- Material 1: Grice, T. (2012). *English for the Maritime Industry: A Language Course book for Seafarers*. Luddenden, WY: Idris Education. This is the latest textbook that has been published for the teaching/learning of ME. It is a comprehensive course targeted at students at pre-intermediate level of English competence (CEFR A1-B1). It contains 15 units, a glossary of relevant terms and an audio CD, and places special emphasis on oral skills and the terminology that characterizes today's maritime industry.

- Material 2: MarEng Plus (2007-2010). Retrieved from https://www.utu.fi/en/units/cms/activities/education/learningmaterial/marengplus/Pages/home.aspx MarEng and MarEngPlus are two web-based ME learning tools developed as a result of a Leonardo da Vinci programme, headed by the University of Turku (Finland) and developed by nine universities and institutions together with fourteen maritime-related advisory partners in Europe. MarEng has been defined as a learning tool containing English-English learning materials and based "on language used in actual situations on board ships, in ports and elsewhere in the shipping chain" (see website). The original MarEng consisted of learning materials on a variety of maritime topics divided into two levels: intermediate and advanced. MarEng Plus enhanced MarEng by adding a new elementary level with new topics, a Teacher's manual covering all topics and levels, and a mobile phone application of the existing MarEng glossary. Given that MarEng Plus is an advanced version of MarEng, for practical reasons both names will be used interchangeably throughout this paper to refer to this learning platform.

- Material 3: SeaTALK (2015). Retrieved from http://www.seatalk.pro/. SeaTALK is an outcome of the European Commission's Lifelong learning programme but, unlike MarEng, it is not a learning tool but a resource that offers a wide variety of ME learning materials online. Materials include listening and reading comprehension exercises, text files, recordings, etc. classified according to the onboard functions of future and present professionals (deck ratings, engineering officers, etc).

- Material 4: IMO (2015). *Model Course 3.17. Maritime English, 2015 edition*. London: International Maritime Organisation. This Model Course was developed for the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) by the International Shipping Federation of London and first published in 2000. A second edition followed in 2009 and in 2015 it was updated and published under an electronic edition. It provides ME teachers with guidance for the teaching of ME both at the elementary to intermediate language levels (Core section 1) and to officers in charge of navigational and engineering watches as well as with a variety of other specific functions (Core section 2). It offers a multi-syllabus approach integrating grammar, vocabulary and phonology with the practice of the four skills and with maritime topics in the background. Both sections offer their corresponding course frameworks, course outlines and syllabi.

Following Tomlinson (2012), learning materials can be "informative", if they inform the learner about the target language; "instructional", if they guide the learner and serve to practise the language; "experiential", if they provide the learner with experience of the target language in use; "eliciting", if thanks to them learners are encouraged to use the language; and "exploratory", if they help the learner to make discoveries about the target language. All the materials in this study, except for one, are informative, instructional, experiential, eliciting and exploratory at the same time. The exception is the IMO Model Course which is informative and instructional, mainly.

## 4.3   Assessment criteria

The criteria used in this study for assessing the presence of intercultural elements in the four selected materials are those developed by Villa and Poblete (2008) as a part of a more comprehensive work that deals with competence-based learning and the assessment of generic competences within the European Space for Higher Education (ESHE). Villa and Poblete (2008) underlie that, today, individuals have to live in a culturally-diverse society and, therefore, have to learn to coexist with diversity. Diversity and interculturality are, in these authors' view, complementary and enriching for both the individual and the group. Villa and Poblete list 15 competence indicators for the assessment of diversity and interculturality in higher education settings and categorize them into three mastery levels as follows:

- Mastery level 1: to understand cultural and social diversity as a human issue and interact respectfully with people who are different from the self;

- Mastery level 2: to accept and understand cultural and social affiliations as structural, volitional and reasonable relations pertaining to the human condition; and,

- Mastery level 3: to show conviction on the fact that cultural diversity generates social cohesion and inclusion.

Table 1 shows competence assessment indicators as classified by the three mastery levels. Moreover, each indicator may be graded against five descriptors labelled 1-5 but, for practical reasons and the purposes of this study, such graded descriptors will not be addressed in this paper.

# 5   Findings and discussion

The four materials have been explored for the presence of intercultural elements and examined for intercultural competence development. As just discussed, several indicators have been used for this analysis. These are listed in table 1 and main findings are discussed below with reference to table 1 and figures 1 and 2.

| MATERIALS<br>ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (indicators) | Text book | Mar Eng | Sea TALK | Model Course |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mastery level 1 | | | | |
| Assimilates the diversity of human condition | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Establishes relationships with no different social and cultural treatment | Y | | Y | |
| Uses relationships with different people for own development | Y | | Y | |
| Does not discriminate people because of different social or cultural reasons | Y | | Y | |
| Understands coexistence as the result of different people interaction | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Mastery level 2 | | | | |
| Analyses cultural and social diversity as a product of human interaction | Y | | Y | Y |
| Aims at elucidating the reasons underlying the customs and social behaviour of different people | Y | Y | Y | |
| Understands interaction with people from other cultures and social condition as a process of personal improvement | | | Y | Y |
| Argues that people make social and cultural realities | Y | | Y | Y |
| Understands that diversity is inherent to human beings | Y | | Y | Y |
| Mastery level 3 | | | | |
| Understands that human coexistence supports social and/or cultural integration | Y | | Y | |
| Understands that one's social and cultural context is embedded in transcultural connections | Y | | Y | |
| Investigates how to generate transcultural connections | | | Y | |
| Uses relativism in an even-tempered manner | | | Y | |
| Facilitates inclusive contexts for the establishing relationships with different people | Y | Y | Y | |

**Table 1:** Criteria for evaluating materials as based on Villa and Poblete's (2008) indicators for the assessment of intercultural competence (Y= Yes, this material meets this indicator).
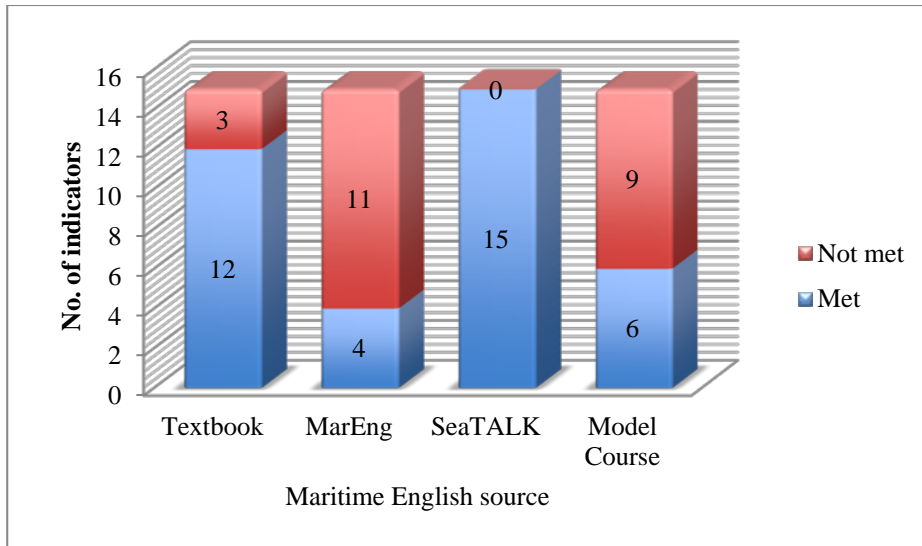
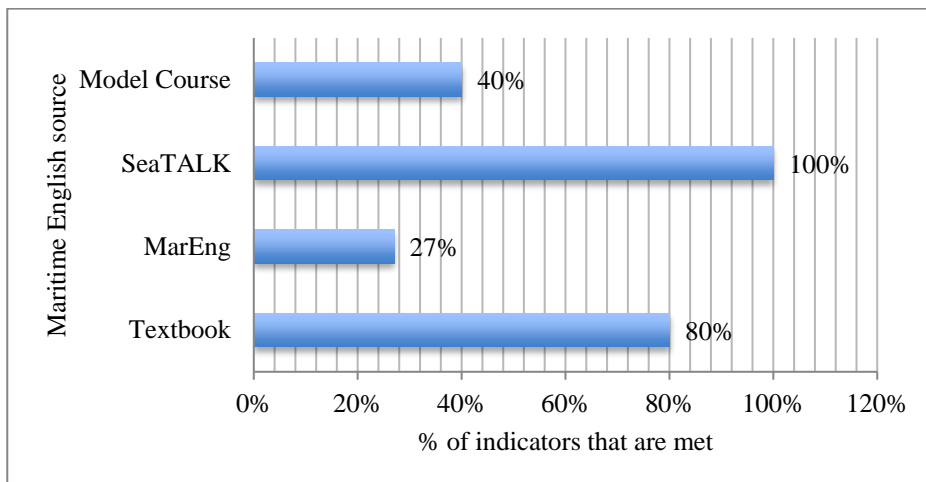**Figure 1:** Degree of compliance of intercultural indicators.

**Figure 2:** Percentage of compliance.

As shown in table 1 and figures 1 and 2, the textbook meets 12 out of the 15 indicators for the assessment of intercultural competence (i.e. 80%) and fully complies with mastery levels 1 and 2. Even though it does not include any explicit activities for the promotion of intercultural competence, interculturality permeates throughout: Multi-ethnic crews are shown in the pictures and exercises are featured by a variety of locations (Palmyra Atoll, the Azores, Polynesia, Marseille port, Cape Town container port, Port Sudan) and a variety of professionals (a Japanese Able Seaman describes a medical emergency, a Spanish cadet working on board a container ship, a maritime pilot from Liverpool, five applicants for a job from five nationalities and five different cultural backgrounds, etc). Just a single exercise focused on the use of language (i.e. "please" and "thank you" are used differently in different cultures) is explicit about raising, at least, intercultural awareness.

Thanks to a variety of exercises MarEng guides students along the voyage of the ship MS Marina and its crew from the port of Santander (Spain) to the port of Kotka (Finland) where she is due to deliver

a cargo of containers and dry bulk. Ports of call on the route are Antwerp (Belgium), Gdynia (Poland) and Riga (Latvia). As it would occur in a real-life setting, the Marina is faced with many situations, operations and activities that involve many shipping professionals from different countries around the world (e.g. a Chief engineer who is said to be "a true Scot" and tells about his customs, a container ship with a mixed crew trading between the Far East and the west coast of the USA). As in the case of the textbook, there are no exercises or notes which specifically address interculturality; thus, meeting only 4 out of the 15 indicators (i.e. 27%) for the assessment of intercultural competence, two of them at the mastery level 1. These data are shown in table 1 and figures 1 and 2.

The online platform SeaTALK is the most explicit of the four materials and provides six activities solely targeted at understanding cultural otherness and promoting intercultural competence. The instructions for their implementation also aim at building spaces for intercultural dialogue in the ME classroom and, hence, there exists full compliance of indicators (i.e. 100%) at the three mastery levels (see table 1 and figures 1 and 2). The intercultural activities are aimed at prospective Deck Officers at the Operational Level with the following language learning outcome: "The learner should be able to demonstrate the ability to listen and communicate internally (within the ship) in routine, face-to-face situations especially with multilingual, multi-ethnic crews". Different learning activities with different intercultural goals have been developed for this language learning outcome (see Table 2). From these, it stands out that a non-Anglo-centred approach prevails and cultural differences are considered from a global inclusive perspective.

| Name of activity | Intercultural goal |
|---|---|
| Intercomprehension in Maritime English | Recognition of maritime English pronounced by non-native (Swedish, Spanish, Finnish) speakers, who are active in navigation |
| Intercultural awareness: maritime taboos | Identification of Rumanian's taboos and superstitions on board and at sea |
| Intercultural awareness: introduction to cross-cultural communication | Identification of cultural differences (western vs eastern cultures) |
| Intercultural awareness: body language challenge | Identification of body language differences (the use of gesture in the Philippines vs. own culture) |
| Intercultural awareness: Fasten seatbelts to the world! | Dealing with misunderstandings as a result of cultural differences on board ships with multicultural crews |
| Intercultural awareness: At ease! | Dealing with cultural differences that might be encountered on board or in a foreign environment – i.e. greetings, turn-taking, body language, eating habits and food, attitudes to sport |

**Table 2:** Intercultural activities in SeaTALK.

Last, the IMO Model Course contains an explicit objective: "1.5.2 Communicate with a multi-lingual crew: Demonstrate the ability to communicate with other crew members, especially multi-lingual and multi-ethnic crew (5 hours)" for which the items of required performance are stated:

- "demonstrate the knowledge and ability to apply social conventions and awareness of cultural aspects and language diversities appropriately
- compare the basic philosophy of at least two cultures; e.g. religions, habits, politeness, do's and don'ts, etc.
- identify the language problems that can arise and endanger effective communication on board ship
- identify the social responsibilities of crew members and illustrate the challenges involved

- listen to orders and messages spoken by non-native English speaking persons and identify the basic information
- write down tips on how to improve working relationships on board
- discuss in groups the expected standards of work and behaviour at sea" (IMO, 2015: 82)

Nevertheless, and despite the above, no explicit activities or instructions are included to achieve this clearly-detailed objective and only six out of 15 indicators are met (i.e. 40%) at the mastery level 2 and solely from a theoretical point. An exploration of the notes for instructors that the Model Course contains points at the ways English language use features cultural differences (hence, the viewpoint is solely Anglo-centred): Students need to be aware of the cultural differences that pitch communicates (page 148) and of different cultural norms for opening, sustaining and closing a conversation (page 162); they also need to consider the issues when communicating with people from other cultures where norms vary regarding how direct/indirect one can be (page 169) and note that text conventions in English may differ from conventions in the students' culture (page 177). Again, table 1 and figures 1 and 2 provide details about compliance and non-compliance of indicators.

# 6  Conclusion

Despite literature awareness on the existence of multicultural crews in the global shipping industry and the theoretical support for intercultural competence promotion (with clear learning objectives as set out by IMO in the Model Course), ME teaching materials are disappointing in that they fail to fulfil an authentic intercultural dialogue. They are effective in making learners aware of the self and the other but simply based on external scanty information and, as a whole, they do not promote skills that help to explore, interpret, relate and interact with the self and the other. With the exception of SeaTALK (and to some extent, the textbook), an exploration of the layout and activities of the four target ME materials shows that these simply function as providers of intercultural awareness, but do not really serve as facilitators for intercultural encounters and creators of "spaces for intercultural dialogue" (Council of Europe, 2008: 46) – hence, potentially failing as "mediators of intercultural communicative competence" in Rico Troncoso's (2012: 130) terms. While it is true that the four materials are a step forward towards the development of intercultural awareness and competence in view of multi-ethnic and multilingual crews, their achievements are still limited.

# 7  Acknowledgements

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