

DEVELOPING THE STUDENTS COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN MARITIME ENGLISH TRAINING

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Abstract

To develop the students communicative competence in order to be qualified in their future work (the seafarers post) is the major educational aim in the field of Maritime. This paper summarizes some useful and efficient methods and practices to make teaching more effective and to help students learn better on the basis of integrated teaching approaches, especially, the CBI, the communicative approach, the natural approach. Language is being taught depend on the students analysis. Successful learning should be learner centered and in real life communication. Teacher needs to supply authentic materials, good comprehensible input and low the affective filter to motivate the students learning. Moreover, teacher is suggested to establish an English-learning environment via learning English through English and teaching English through English.

Key words

communicative competence ; maritime English training ; needs analysis ; authentic materials ; comprehensible input ; affective filter

1 . Introduction

Communicative competence in the foreign language is the ability to communicate with native speakers in real life situations — authentic interpersonal communication that cannot be separated from the cultural, paralinguistic, and nonverbal aspects of language (Spolsky 1978). A person who possesses communicative competence in a foreign language

- can construct “long stretches” of language (in speaking and writing) ;
- is able to understand messages from a variety of sources correctly ;
- can find ways to adapt his language to deal with misunderstandings/breakdowns in communication ;
- understands linguistic rules correctly ;
- can use the linguistic rules spontaneously and with ease ;
- can judge if his intended message has been correctly understood ;
- can interact appropriately in a variety of social situations ;
- uses a culturally acceptable tone to avoid being perceived as other foreign language speakers .

According to the specific requirements of the STCW 78/95 convention made by IMO, the seafarers are required to be competent in using English for professional purposes. For seafarers to be able to communicate effectively and efficiently, they need to be able to use and understand English in a variety of situations. Mainly, there are two aspects for them to achieve, i.e. “Being able to use English” and “Being able to understand English”. The former means that the seafarer can combine the “building blocks” of language to express himself clearly and appropriately in speaking and writing. The latter means that the seafarer can interpret messages that he hears and reads correctly and comprehensibly (stipulated in the STCW convention, for example: the seafarers should have the adequate knowledge of the English

language to use charts & other nautical publications ; understand meteorological information & messages ; communicate with other ships & coast stations ; perform the duties with a multilingual crew ; communicate with passengers during an emergency .). When a seafarer can demonstrate the ability to do this , he proves his communicative competence in English .

This paper will make some considerations and suggestions on how to foster the students (seafarers) communicative competence in maritime English training .

2 . Students centered Teaching

Teaching “ can be successful only if it is directly relevant to students and their lives ” . Language skills “ can be acquired as students seek meaning and process texts that are of interest to them ” (Johns 1997) . Students centered teaching encourages active learning via student involvement . Students are encouraged to think about and experiment with language , with the teacher providing guidance , supervision and encouragement . While teachers direct and facilitate learning , students themselves have ultimate responsibility for their own progress . Students who have a well developed appreciation of their own learning style and preferences can enable them to build on their strengths and improve their weaknesses . The teacher “ is no more than a facilitator who gives students space to voice their own interests in their own discourses ” (Cope & Kalantzis 1993 5) . Teachers can assist students to become aware of their personal learning by encouraging students to reflect upon their own progress on a regular basis .

3 . Students Analysis

Students analysis can give two kinds of information for teaching . One reflects the students possession — their current level of competence in language . The other represents what students want to achieve . It is important to understand students learning needs in order to : plan and prepare maritime English training (objectives , aims , syllabus , curriculum , materials , resources) , implement maritime English training (deliver training to suit individual needs and learning styles , within appropriate time) , evaluate maritime English training (assess Progress by comparing results with desired outcomes of training , establish what needs to be covered in future) . If students want to communicate independently as seafarers in an international environment , they require continuously appropriate training . Successful training or teaching is based on the teacher understanding and responding to students needs . Needs analysis can be done at the start of the course — to provide essential information about individual seafarers . Needs analysis can be an ongoing procedure to help decide the focus of training and follow students progress . Ongoing needs analysis can help the teacher decide the focus of the teaching . Snow (Snow , Met & Genesee 1989) points out “ Language acquisition is further facilitated and motivation increased if the information acquired is highly relevant to students personal and educational goals ” .

4 . Authentic Materials

Authentic materials are resources which were not designed specifically for Maritime English language teaching but which can be adapted for this purpose . Students are exposed to natural use of English in authentic materials . Authentic materials can provide good models of language and add variety to textbook routine . They can increase students motivation to understand “ real ” English . If simple tasks are prepared , authentic materials can be used even by students with a low language level . They can be sourced from International Maritime Organization (IMO) , shipping companies , national legislators , college technical departments , the internet , and so on . In maritime English training , the authentic materials include ship s correspondence , company manuals , fleet standing instructions , recordings of conversation on board a ship , industry journals , newspapers , radio and TV programs , etc . Teachers also can build up a bank of resources to supplement authentic materials such as collecting / drawing visual images to cover a range of topics , designing role play situations and cards , preparing flashcards for vocabulary and pronunciation practice .

5 . Comprehensible Input

Input is the term used to describe new information that teachers select and present to students . Krashen (1982 , 1985) asserts that “ Language is most efficiently acquired when presented through comprehensible input that just beyond the learner s current proficiency level ” . In teaching , the teacher

needs to utilize the comprehensible input (known as $i + 1$ input) that is just beyond students' competence but not beyond their understanding. Therefore, limiting the amount of new input is essential, regardless of the topic. Presenting language step by step in small sections is more effective than overloading students with a lot of new materials all at once. Teachers also need to take account of the amount of time spent on input that will be determined by the aims of the lesson and the knowledge of the students.

6 . Affective Filter

Krashen and Terrell (Krashen & Terrell 1983) argue that the affective filter prevents input from being used for language acquisition and a learner who is tense, angry, anxious, or bored may filter out the input, making it unavailable for acquisition. The filter will be "up" when the learner is stressed, self-conscious, or unmotivated. It will be "down" when the learner is relaxed and motivated (Lightbown & Spada 2002). Thus, positive motivation and right attitude play an important role in language acquisition. Students who are much motivated, positive and respond well do contribute to a good rapport and a productive learning atmosphere. Once students get used to being more involved during lessons, they become more motivated to learn. When they are motivated to learn, they usually become more successful at English (Joanna & Heather 2000). Teacher needs to actually supply good comprehensible input and lower the affective filter in the classroom.

7 . Learning English Through English

Like children who "pick up" their first language, students can also "pick up" a certain amount of language in the class, given the right conditions. This process of second language acquisition occurs when students have consistent exposure to English that is just a little above their own level. Even though the students may not understand every word that the teacher says, they can often be helped to guess the meaning if the context is made clear to them, for example, through the use of pictures, diagrams, charts and gestures. Clear language context is a very important part of communicative teaching as it helps students develop the skills they need for understanding language in real life situations.

8 . Teaching English Through English

Teaching English through English establishes an English speaking environment in the class. Instead of using the students' first language to talk about English, teachers explain in English. The teacher's language is simplified to suit the students' level and clear situational contexts are created to demonstrate meaning using combinations of pictures, drawings, diagrams and gesture. Although translation can be a quick and useful way for a teacher to provide a brief explanation or check understanding, over use of the students' first language (sometimes referred to as the L1) does not give them the chance to acquire English nor to develop important "discovery" strategies. The more English that students are exposed to, the more familiar they will become with it and the more likely they are to learn to "think in English". This is especially important if the students have limited access to English outside the class. Teachers can maximize the students' exposure to the language by using English for the majority of communication in the class and by encouraging the students to speak English as much as possible. Even with beginners, translation should be used only when the teacher judges it to be necessary, not as the main means of instruction.

9 . Real Life Communication

Students need to use language in realistic ways (e.g., asking, discussing, negotiating) for realistic purposes (e.g., finding out information, exchanging opinions, solving problems). While actively using English for tasks, students can acquire language from each other and also practise communicating in a social context. Real life communication is usually based on the need to exchange information of any kind. For example, the captain of a ship may give an instruction to the chief engineer; the duty officer may require a report from the coast guard; a seafarer may read a personal letter. In each of these examples, people are exchanging information for a specific reason. This exchange can be imitated in the language class by creating a context for students to share information that they have been given by speaking to one or more people. This type of activity may involve pairs, groups or the whole class exchanging information simultaneously.

10 . Conclusion

In conclusion ,according to Walton s (1992 2)claim ,the com municative competence is the capacity to perform a range of occupationally and professionally relevant com municative tasks with members of another cultural and linguistic com munity using the language of that com munity ,whether that com munity is domestic or abroad . The students ,thus ,need to understand how social contexts and specific situations influence the choice of language and type of com munication . They also need to know the conventions for using the language in specific situations (e g . using the telephone ; writing a telex) and , more importantly ,they should know some strategies for coping with misunderstanding in the event that com munication breaks down . Teaching ,then ,needs to reflect genuine use of language so that the student is equipped for com municating in “the real world ” .

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