

## Exploring the Maritime Words: An Introduction

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### Abstract

Maritime English is also known as sea words or sea speak. It is the language used in a maritime world or maritime industry worldwide. As its name, the Maritime English (ME) is the most typical and unique language among other branches of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) such as English for business (EB), English for Tourism (ET), English for Journalism (EJ), etc. This paper attempts to explore an overview of the nature of Maritime English in terms of spelling, grammatical patterns, and vocabulary usage.

*Keywords: Spelling, grammatical patterns, vocabulary usages*

### I. Introduction

Globally, the world of maritime has developed rapidly in the last ten years. And in Indonesian context, it has had its vocal point by the last four years known as “sea toll.” Maritime world or maritime industry is also known as the industry with multi-crew. They come from different backgrounds, cultures, competences, and languages. As the world-wide industry, with multi-workers, the language used in the maritime world is English. English is officially declared and used as the language of the maritime world.

So what is actually the Maritime English? Normaizura in <https://prezi.com/erxyzpkeyvi5/introduction-to-maritime-english/23/5/2018/>; Blakey,(1978), Pritcard (2009) states that Maritime English is as a navigational and safety communications from ship to shore and vice versa, ship to ship , and on board ships must be precise, simple and unambiguous, so as to avoid confusion and error, there is a need to standardize the language used.

In line with Nomaizura, the Maritime English is also defined in the following terms such as 1) it is the language used to communicate in all maritime-specific situations, on-board, ship to ship, and ship to shore, 2) it includes maritime-specific terminology – navigation, on-board operations, roles and responsibilities, health and safety, emergencies, 3) English which has been simplified for use by seafarers of all nationalities (IMO, 1995), 4) Maritime English has been codified by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP),

and 5) General English language skills need to be good enough to combine with SMCP to achieve consistent and clear communication at sea. <https://www.slideshare.net/SpecialistLanguageCourses/maritime-english-courses-worldwide/12/5/217>.

Then, in International Maritime Organization (IMO), 1995 further is stated that Maritime English is a codified English in such a unique and typical one. The uniqueness and typicalities of English is labelled as a Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP). The IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) has been compiled 1) to assist in the greater safety navigation and of the conduct of the ship, 2) to assist maritime training institutions in meeting the objectives mentioned, and 3) to standardize the language used in communication for navigation at sea, in port o standardize the language used in communication for navigation at sea, in port approaches, waterways and harbors, and on board vessel with multilingual crews.

This paper attempts to explore an overview of the nature of Maritime English in terms of spelling and figure, grammatical patterns, and vocabulary usage.

## II. Description and Discussion

### 1. The spelling systems

Maritime alphabets are uniquely different from other field of study of English for specific purposes (ESP) such as banking English, Media English, English of Law, etc. This shows that maritime alphabet is a typical one. Even though, Maritime English alphabets still uses the Latin language such letters 'a, b, c, d'....etc, but they are used and spelled differently in Maritime world. For example, letter /a/ is spelled /Alfa/, /b/ is spelled /Bravo/, /c/ is spelled /Charlie/ etc. Here are the complete Maritime English alphabets.

Letter	Code	Letter	Code
A	<u>Alfa</u>	N	<u>November</u>
B	<u>Bravo</u>	O	<u>Oscar</u>
C	<u>Charlie</u>	P	<u>Papa</u>
D	<u>Delta</u>	Q	<u>Quebec</u>
E	<u>Echo</u>	R	<u>Romeo</u>
F	<u>Foxtrot</u>	S	<u>Sierra</u>
G	<u>Golf</u>	T	<u>Tango</u>
H	<u>Hotel</u>	U	<u>Uniform</u>
I	<u>India</u>	V	<u>Victor</u>
J	<u>Juliet</u>	W	<u>Whisky</u>
K	<u>Kilo</u>	X	<u>X-ray</u>

<i>L</i>	<i>Lima</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Yankee</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Mike</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Zulu</i>

Like, the spelling system, numbers are also modified in terms of pronunciation compared to general English as shown by the following data Blakey,(1978) in (Dirgayasa, 2009).

Figure	Code word
0	<i>Nadazero</i>
1	<i>Unaone</i>
2	<i>Bissotwo</i>
3	<i>Terrathree</i>
4	<i>Kartefour</i>
5	<i>Pantafive</i>
6	<i>Soxisix</i>
7	<i>Setteseven</i>
8	<i>Oktoeight</i>
9	<i>Novenine</i>
Full stop	<i>Stop</i>
Decimal point	<i>Decimal</i>

In addition, relating to numbers, the numbers are to be spoken in separate digits. For example, “*One-five-zero*” is for “150.” Another example is like the command sentence for Helm order “*Starboard 25 degree*”. It must be spoken as “*Starboard two-five degree.*” and so forth (Blakey, 1978).

Another example is about the use of ‘*decimal*’ as in ‘2.5’ which must be spoken as ‘*two decimal five*’ or sometime it is also spoken ‘*two point five*’, etc.

## 2.The Grammatical Patterns

One of the uniqueness of the Maritime English is its restricted patterns. By restricted patterns, consequently, the maritime English grammatical pattern tend to be simple and or simplified. The common grammatical patterns of Maritime English are uniquely different from the general English in several points.

First, it is *Giving Instruction* between and among the crew member. The instruction or giving instruction and giving commands in maritime world is frequently used. The frequent use of Giving Instruction is when there is emergency on board such as collision, grounding, sinking, fire, etc. To respond or answer the *Instruction* in maritime world is not similar to what is used in general English. For example the *Instruction*: “*Standby life boat, sir*” is not responded or answered like “*Yes sir*” or “*Ok sir,*” etc. But it must be replied like: “*Motor lifeboat stood by.*” Or

the *Instruction* of “Close all opening outlets.” is not responded or answered like “Of course” or “Sure.” But it must be replied by statement like “Opening outlets closed.” The other *Instructions* and their ways to answers commonly used at sea are as follows:

No	Giving Instruction	Answering Instruction
1	<i>Hoist flag signal “Oscar”</i>	<i>Flag signal “Oscar” hoisted.</i>
2	<i>Request diving survey</i>	<i>Diving survey requested.</i>
3	<i>Stop engine</i>	<i>Engine stopped</i>
4	<i>Send divers to check leak</i>	<i>Divers sent to check leak</i>
5	<i>Have rescue team on stand by</i>	<i>Rescue team standing by</i>
6	<i>Maintain visual contact</i>	<i>Team maintain visual contact</i>
7	<i>Sound on vessel “aground” bell.</i>	<i>We sound on vessel “aground” bell.</i>
8	<i>Stand by for let go</i>	<i>Standing by for let go.</i>

IMO, 1995

Second, are *the ambiguous words*. Some words in English have meanings depending on the context in which they appear. Misunderstanding frequently occurs, especially in (Vessel Traffic System (VTS) communications which often have caused accidents at sea. The ambiguous words include the use of ‘may’, ‘might’, ‘should’, and ‘could.’ Here are the examples how ‘may’, ‘might’, ‘should’ and ‘could’ are not used in sentences in the maritime world.

Word	Do not say	Say
MAY	<i>“May I enter fairway? You may enter fairway.</i>	<i>Is it permitted to enter fairway? It is permitted to enter fairway.(question).</i>
MIGHT	<i>I might enter fairway</i>	<i>I will enter fairway. (intention)</i>
SOULD	<i>You should anchor in anchorage-3</i>	<i>Anchor in anchorage-3 (advice).</i>
COULD	<i>You could be running into danger.</i>	<i>You are running into danger. (Warning)</i>

Like the above ambiguous words, the use of word ‘Can’ either describes the possibility or the capability of doing something is also avoided. In SMCP states that the word ‘Can’ tends to lead and convey the ambiguous meaning. As a seafarer, avoid to say: “Can I use the shallow draft fairway at this time?” But you have to say: “QUESTION. Do I have permission to use the shallow draft fairway at this time?” Also, the word ‘May’ is also similar to usage of the word ‘Can.’

Third, are *Prowords*. In Maritime world, the radio operators have great responsibility. Messages must be delivered quickly. But a simple error can cause major problems. For the reason, radio communication relies on procedural words, or prowords. These terms speed up communication and reduce errors (Sheppard and Dooley, 2013). The common prowords or procedural words in maritime English as follows:

Prowords	Meaning
Roger	<i>I received your message</i>
Over	<i>I am finished speaking and need a response</i>
Out	<i>I am finished speaking and no response is needed</i>
Affirmative	<i>Yes</i>
Negative	<i>No</i>
Say again	<i>Repeat your last transmission</i>
I spell	<i>The next word will be spelled out letter by letter</i>

The phonetic alphabet as shown above also provides clear communication-even between speakers of different languages. Use it instead of the normal pronunciation of letters. Otherwise letters such as /C/ and /D/ can commonly be heard incorrectly.

### 3.The Vocabulary Usages

Another unique language at sea is the vocabulary usage. It is a fact that when your first time on a ship is like your first visit to another country. It seems that you may have many different things between what you have in your country and what another country has.

In term of Maritime English, you cannot say “*Turn left for 12 degree.*” But you have to say “*Port 12 degree.*” This shows that the *directional words* in land is different from in nautical term. In land-based term, you are familiar with the words such as ‘*front*’, ‘*rear*’, ‘*left*’, ‘*right*’, and ‘*backward.*’ So what to say in maritime world? The equivalences of the land-based term in terms of directional words as follows:

Land-based Term	Nautical Term
<i>Front</i>	<i>Bow</i>
<i>Rear</i>	<i>Stern</i>
<i>Left*</i>	<i>Port</i>
<i>Right*</i>	<i>Starboard</i>
<i>Backward*</i>	<i>Aft</i>

However, in some cases, some terms are harder. For example, if something is ‘*abaft*’ to something else, it’s closer to the stern. If it’s ‘*astern*,’ it’s behind the ship. If something is ‘*inboard*,’ it’s close to the centerline of a ship. ‘*Outboard*’ is the opposite. But some terms mean exactly what the sound like. ‘Forward’ just means ‘*forward*’. And ‘*topside*’ items are above the waterline, while items below are on lower decks (Sheppard, ST., Evans V., and Dooley J., 2013).

Vocabulary usages in maritime English is also unique when to talk about measurement. Nautical measurements are different from land measurement (non-nautical terms). For example, ‘*distances*’ are measured in ‘*nautical miles*’ or 6.076 feet. Then, it is important to note clearly that 1 nautical mile is equal to 1.15 miles and 1 nautical mile is equal to 1.85 km.

Then, ‘*depths*’ are measured in ‘*fathom*’ and it is not feet. A fathom is equal to six feet or 1.8 meters. In maritime world, speed is measured by ‘*knot*’ and not ‘*miles*’ or ‘*kilometer*’ per hour. In addition, some terms are often mistaken for land-based measurements. For example, a ‘*gross ton*’ does not refer to the weight of the ship’s mass but it measures a vessels’ internal volume.

In term of vocabulary usage, some vocabulary phrases also unique and typical ones. For example, the phrase ‘*Man over board*’ does not mean ‘*man on board or man in board*. This phrase is used to refer ‘*Man falls into the sea.*’ The other examples of vocabulary phrases used in maritime words are ‘*make the land*’ means ‘*reach the shore*’ or ‘*Easy to five*’ is to replace ‘*carefully to reach speed five knot*’ and ‘*sea dog*’ refers to ‘*an old sailor.*’ Or ‘*Put to sea*’ refers to ‘*to leave port.*’etc.

### III. Conclusion

The Maritime English as the language used to communicate in all maritime-specific situations, on-board, ship to ship, and ship to shore, ship to helicopter in case of emergency is really restricted language. The restriction and modification (to some extents) of the English language is due to Maritime world and industry’s high risk industry in terms of accident at sea. Also, crew of ship are from different countries with different linguistic competences, proficiencies and cultural background.

Misunderstanding and error in communication must be effectively minimized and avoided. That’s why the Maritime English needs standardization, codification, and restriction in order to meet the nature of life of the maritime world. The typical spelling system, grammar patterns, and vocabulary usages show how Maritime words are distinctively unique and different from any other branches of ESP English such as English for Journalism (EJ) or English for Business (EB), English for Medical (EM), etc.

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