Suggestions on the Development of Standard Engineering Communication Phrases

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Abstract : *Under the STCW Convention, marine engineers are required to have a satisfactory level of maritime English proficiency so that they can successfully perform their duties on board or maintain and operate the various equipment and facilities installed in the ship. More specifically, the importance of the engineers' written communication skills has been highlighted since their documents (for instance, post-work records, legal, and/or internal reports) have a significant legal impact in the event of a marine casualty or maritime crime. To suggest the necessity of developing standard engineering logbook phrases (SELP), therefore, this paper will closely analyse three-month authentic marine engineers' work records written by Korean officers. From the analysis, the problems and errors in the logbook will be analysed, and considerations to be taken into account in the development of SELP will be illustrated. Finally, the future actions for this standardised written communication for the logbook entry will be sought.*

Key words : *STCW Convention, Engineer's Log Book, Maritime English, Communication, Work Record*

1. Introduction

A number of IMO conventions, such as SOLAS, MARPOL, and STCW, require a logbook record for marine engineers. A list of information and contents to be specified in the logbook is quite varied according to the events that occurred during watchkeeping and workday. Considering that any of the records in the logbook could be adopted as part of critical court evidence in a marine casualty or maritime crime, a precise, accurate, and complete logbook entry is highly essential. However, the international guideline on how to write a logbook entry in a mutually agreeable and understandable manner has not been provided so far.

In this perspective, the styles and expressions of one identical engineering situation on board can be quite different each ship and/or engineer, and this could significantly hinder attaining the communicative goal of writing a logbook. In this study, therefore, to suggest the necessity of SELP's establishment, linguistic features and characteristics of a three-month authentic engineering logbook will be closely analysed. From the analysis, typical communicative situations and repetitive occurring phrases will be identified, and the considerations to be taken account in the development of SELP will be illustrated based on the problems and errors identified in the data. Finally, the future actions for this standardised written communication for the logbook entry will be sought.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The purpose of the logbook

An engine room logbook is 'a track record of all ship machinery parameters, performance, maintenance, and malfunctions'(Karan, 2017). All kinds of daily routines, trainings, and incidents carried out in the ship engine room must be recorded in the remarks column of the engineers' logbook according to national and international rules and regulations. Recording of remarks is specifically important for engineers to compare the current performance of the engine room machinery with that of the past, to check the progression of daily or per-voyage maintenance plans and to safely report and hand over the work in her or his own watch among the engine room crew. It is also quite useful for ship owners to monitor whether devices and equipment in the engine room are properly repaired and adequately maintained according to international safety management system.

2.2 Linguistic characteristics of the logbook

The linguistic characteristics of the engine room logbook have not been clearly specified as those suggested in the IMO Standard Maritime Communication Phrases(SMCP), which are designed for oral VHF communication between ships and shores(IMO, 2001). Taking some of the communicative features from SMCP as examples, the language should be a simplified version by reducing

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'grammatical, lexical and idiomatic varieties to a tolerable minimum using standardized structures for the sake of its functional aspect'. Most research largely focuses on logbook entries of the bridge team, and, therefore, relatively, those engineers have not received much attention. It is specifically important for engineers who do not use English as a mother tongue, considering their linguistic obstacles:

Their language structures (e.g., the order of subject and object) being non-identical to that of English, and it would be a challenge for them to decide the level of simplicity of the English structures while avoiding ambiguity in meaning (Karan, 2017).

The different individual and cultural perceptions when describing a situation specifically in terms of deciding the extent of details of the information to be offered. Inadequate understanding of – and/or mistakes in – using abbreviations in a non-standardised format(e.g., EMERGENCY, EMER'CY, EM'CY)

3. Analysis

4.1. Limited number of vocabulary

As clearly observed from the table, the top 100 words occupy 68.9% of the total words of the logbook, and it means that a very limited set of the words are used for the logbook entries.

4.2. Nonstandard use of abbreviation

A list of standard abbreviations should be provided. As observed in the logbook, abbreviations are adopted in most cases (e.g., FO for fuel oil), but some abbreviations are also undefined (e.g., GEN possibly for general and/or generator). In other cases, the abbreviations for the same word are written differently, for example, EMERCY, EMERY, and EMERCY for emergency and EXH or EXHS for exhaust.

4.3. Misspelling and incorrect language use

The list of frequently used words needs to be provided. Since the logbook entries are composed of a very simple language structure with 6.78 words on average per line, the individual words should be as accurately as possible to deliver the intended meaning briefly and clearly. However, many words are misspelled (e.g., sequcnce, scoied, evaporator, and enginges) and are grammatically incorrect, specifically in expressing countable and uncountable nouns (e.g., machineries).

4.4. Restricted number of prepositions

The number of prepositions and its kind are quite different from those of general English. The order of prepositions according to its occurrences is as follows: of (91, 4.5%), in (28, 1.4%), by (11, 0.5%), as (8, 0.4%), to (8, 0.4%), from (6, 0.3%), on (5, 0.2%) and through (1, 0.049%). Only eight prepositions listed above were identified.

4. Conclusion

A limited number of vocabulary was used, and almost half of them rarely occurred, showing that almost half of the words are used just once during the three-month record;

Abbreviations were not standardised. Misspellings and grammatically incorrect errors were often;

The use of prepositions was highly restricted;

The language structures were nonstandard, even when the identical activity was described.

These clearly demonstrate that the establishment of SELP could be quite beneficial both for engineers on board and for teaching and learning purposes.

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