

MARITIME ENGLISH AT A HELLENIC MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY: THE ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES' BRANCH MEETS THE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE THEORY

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Abstract. The two authors designed and piloted a novel Questionnaire for the measurement of intercultural awareness at the Deck department of a Hellenic Merchant Marine Academy, where the second author was employed to teach Maritime English. Such tool has not been proposed to date, not to mention distributed at the student population of trainee officers on watch. Only four students participated in our research longitudinally, thus statistical analysis of their answers in particular was not conducted. However, our research could be said to pave the way to similar designs with larger samples.

Keywords: Maritime English; Hellenic Merchant Marine Academy; intercultural awareness

Introduction

The Hellenic Merchant Marine Academies in Greece, hereafter HMMA, are post-secondary MET Institutes that prepare students at undergraduate level to become officers on watch and engineers on vessels across the seas of the world. In the academic year 2019 – 2020, the second author was employed at the Deck department in one of them as a Maritime English teacher. After realizing that there was a gap in the Maritime English curriculum of the Institutes concerning graduates' level of intercultural awareness, she decided together with her supervisor – Author 1 - to complete this gap by designing and piloting a Questionnaire which included questions on both English language proficiency (*EC test*), placing students at CEFR levels (CEFR 2001; 2020), as well as multiple-choice questions using cultural scripts (*C quiz*). Though intercultural issues have been an integral part of the Academies' study curriculum – for instance the Hellenic Government Gazette,

the so-called FEK, issue B', 2321/13.06.2019, for the Deck Department, semester E: "*cross –cultural issues*", p. 25762, future Captains in their majority answered positively to the following Question of a written survey: "*Do you want to learn more about the cultures with which you are said to embark more frequently? For example, the Filipino culture, the Russian culture, the Chinese culture*". It could be said, then, that our research bridges the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) branch of Maritime English with the Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) theory (Byram 1997, 2009; Chen & Starosta 1998 - 1999), as well as the work by Wierzbicka (1994) and her colleagues on cultural scripts.

Scope of this paper

The aim of this paper is to present aspects of our longitudinal research (academic years 2019-2022) at a HMMA and more particularly our *Pilot_EC_C_Questionnaire*.

English is the lingua franca onboard vessels that travel the seas of the world (Dacwag 2017), and Maritime English in particular is an ESP branch (Iakovaki & Progoulaki 2010). Participants of this longitudinal research, all HMMA students who studied Maritime English among other courses, aspiring to be Captains, could have or not earned a certificate of English as a Foreign Language prior to matriculation. Thus, their English Competence (EC) could have varied between A1 and C2 CEFR level 1,2) when progressing towards graduation unless they were already C2 proficient users of English. Nevertheless, based on the HMMA study curriculum, all graduates will have reached the B2 CEFR level of English by the time of their graduation.

Probing relevant literature

The second author's exhaustive research in literature commenced with the ICC theory and more specifically with Byram's '*prescriptive*' (2009) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence. The purpose of his model was for foreign language teachers to include both linguistic and intercultural competence in their teaching (2009, p. 324). Given that both authors of the present have had a background in teaching, Byram's purpose was also used in her doctoral study because "*Textbooks used in foreign language (FL) instruction are primarily designed to facilitate language learning, but they cannot simply do that since language learning is inseparable from its cultural context.*" (Skopinskaja 2003, p. 39). That aim was linked with the detailed analysis of the aspects of the ICC by Chen & Starosta (1998 – 1999) and particularly the cognitive dimension of the ICC represented by intercultural awareness (C). The leading work of Wierzbicka and her colleagues on the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) and particularly the theory of cultural scripts to which I was introduced by my supervisor – Author 1 – have been an integral part of my doctoral study given that these scripts have

managed to phrase cultural values and norms in plain words, the so called “*semantic primes*” (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2007, p. 2). In fact, those basic words have been said to have exponents in all languages. These three aspects then, meaning 1) Byram’s purpose of his model, 2) the cognitive dimension of the ICC as presented by Chen & Starosta, and 3) the theory of cultural scripts by Wierzbicka, could be said to have met at the ESP branch of Maritime English at a HMMA.

The lacuna in literature was rather clear since to date there had not been any instrument for the measurement of *C* quantitatively: “*Although a thorough literature review shows that presently there is no instrument used to directly measure intercultural awareness in the field, (...)*” (Chen & Starosta 1998 – 1999, pp. 45 – 46). Except for that, this research aimed at filling other gaps, too, since it was a longitudinal study involving students at a HMMA and those participants had not been sampled before, at least not in terms of their *C*.

According to Iakovaki & Progoulaki (2010), “*(...) the first step towards appraising the needs of the learners, but also of the field specialists and other stakeholders, is to conduct a Needs Analysis.*” (p. 145). In fact, the process of Needs Analysis involves several steps (Baniadam n.d., p. 6). Step 1: decide the aim of the Needs Analysis; and in this study it was to measure students’ English competence (*EC*) as well as *C*; step 2: know the student population which for this study were HMMA students; step 3 take decisions on the approaches followed. Our decision was not to reveal my research purpose to my students, yet to ensure the anonymity of responses. Determining limitations is step 4: I chose not to offer any financial compensation though the possibility of drop-out rates surging among the academic years was high. The 5th step is to select the methods for collecting data, and for the present that was to design and pilot a tailor-made Questionnaire, the *EC_C Questionnaire*, which included a *C quiz* especially designed for the measurement of *C*. The next is to collect data and I accomplished that longitudinally (academic years 2019 – 2020, 2020 – 2021 and 2021 – 2022). It should be made clear that because the dissertation of the second author had been a work in progress, the present article cannot encompass all its aspects, merely serve as an indicative publication. The dissertation will thoroughly present the remaining steps of the Needs Analysis and which are mostly analyzing and interpreting the results and deciding on the Maritime English syllabus objectives which will lead to a proposed new syllabus and teaching materials for the Maritime English course at the HMMA.

Coming again to this study in the so-called *ICC survey* this question was included: “*Do you want to learn more about the cultures with which you are said to embark more frequently? For example, the Filipino culture, the Russian culture, the Chinese culture*”, as well as other questions requesting from students to report on what they actually wanted. In the *EC_C Questionnaire* students were again requested to write what they themselves wanted. For instance, «#6 Θέλεις να βελτιώσεις το επίπεδό σου στα *Γενικά Αγγλικά*;» (approximate translation in English can be seen

in the parentheses: “Do you want to improve your level at **General English**?”) «#10 Θέλεις να προετοιμαστείς για εξετάσεις για πτυχίο **Γενικών Αγγλικών** στα πλαίσια των σπουδών σου στην ΑΕΝ και χωρίς οικονομική επιβάρυνση;» (“Do you want to prepare for an exam on **General English** within your studies at the Hellenic Merchant Marine Academy and without exam fees?”), «#11 Για ποιο επίπεδο **Γενικών Αγγλικών** θέλεις;» (“For which level of **General English** would you like to do that?”). The reason I asked students to report in written form on what they wanted was because based on Baniadam (n.d.) “Learner perceived needs is a **VERY** important factor in motivation. They must not be ignored. Usually these wants are very personal; therefore, they are sometimes called 'subjective needs'.” (p. 7).

Methods

Our major research methodology was the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) programme led by Wierzbicka (1994) and her colleagues (for instance, Goddard & Wierzbicka 2007) as well as the *Intercultural Communication Competence* 1996 Model by Chen & Starosta (1998 – 1999) and particularly its cognitive aspect represented by intercultural awareness.

Chronologically the question “Do you want to learn more about the cultures with which you are said to embark more frequently? For example, the Filipino culture, the Russian culture, the Chinese culture as part of the written ICC survey back in 2019 came second (Stage 2), whereas the *Pilot EC_C Questionnaire* first (Stage 1), yet the results that were primarily analyzed were the ones in the ICC survey (Koutiva 2020). Students given an ID back then were fitted for the analysis of results of the Pilot Questionnaire. Because an extensive presentation of these will be included in the doctoral dissertation of the second author, we will present them here only briefly. Thus, in October 2019 students of the second author at the Deck department of a HMMA all blind to the research hypotheses of my dissertation were distributed a pencil and paper *Pilot_EC_C Questionnaire* during the first week of winter study semester. Students were orally assured their names would remain confidential, and so it has been ever since. At the top of the page, besides writing their name, class and date, students were requested to: 1) report on the number of their embarkations, if any, an addition made later and all students added it afterwards, 2) self-assess their level of English, among a – e levels, a) *Excellent*, b) *Very Good*, c) *Good*, d) *Poor* and e) *Very Poor*, as well as 3) circle whether they had a certificate of English (Yes/ No). What followed was a standardized, multiple-choice, English proficiency test found online with 50 items (1 was excluded from analysis). A line separated all that from the second part, dedicated to intercultural training, and which commenced with Question 1 in both English and Greek so as to ensure comprehensibility: ***Because your colleagues are mostly of different nationalities, how well trained you regard yourself to be so as to cope with intercultural issues at work?*** (Επειδή οι συνάδελφοί σου προέρχονται

κυρίως από διαφορετικές εθνικότητες, πόσο εκπαιδευμένος /η θεωρείς ότι είσαι για να ανταπεξέλθεις σε διαπολιτισμικά ζητήματα στη δουλειά;) Circle a, b, c, d or e., and the options were these in English and Greek: a) “Sufficiently trained (Επαρκώς)”, b) “Well trained (Καλά)”, c) “Basically trained (Βασικά)”, d) “Not well trained (Όχι καλά)”, e) “Not trained at all (Καθόλου)”.

Following this, there were 8 multiple-choice questions with cultural scripts taken from publications such as Goddard & Wierzbicka (2007), Goddard & Wierzbicka (2004), Goddard & Ye (2015), with one excluded from analysis. In Appendix 5 readers can find our proposed tool for the measurement of intercultural awareness, the so-called *C quiz*, and which, to the best of our knowledge, has not appeared in literature, at least not to date. It should be noted here that cultural scripts were proposed to be used in our study by my supervisor – Author 1- and that the design of the *C quiz* was a joint effort. Besides never implemented as a measurement tool before, cultural scripts were also used because we firmly believe they resemble the basic form of English the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases, an essential handbook for the ESP branch of Maritime English³). It is for that reason that it was not deemed as necessary to have the Greek translation of each script in our *C quiz*. In fact, cultural scripts such as “when a person does something, it is good if this person can think like this: “I am doing this because I want to do it, not because someone else wants me to do it” were believed to be equally comprehensible by both proficient and basic learners of English. For these reasons cultural scripts were regarded as ideal for the measurement of *C*. Since both authors are experienced in teaching English as a Foreign Language, the multiple-choice format was chosen so as to be consistent with the English proficiency test that preceded the *C quiz*. Our proposed tool could be used not just in the ESP context but in any field in which this cognitive aspect of the ICC should be quantified. Next there was a question on how the second author, a teacher of English as a Foreign Language, could help students so that the latter could interact with people of different nationalities. Our *Pilot_EC_C_Questionnaire* ended with a thank you note. Its results follow in section 3 below.

Results

Tables 1 – 4 (Appendices 1 – 4) present the results of our *Pilot_EC_C_Questionnaire*. Table 1 in particular presents the number of students that circled each of the 5 levels of English students were requested to select from. Along with students’ self-assessment on English Competence (*EC*), the number of students that circled each of the levels of intercultural training (*IC*) they felt they have can be seen (Appendix 1). In Table 2 (Appendix 2) readers can see how many students circled either *Yes* or *No* for the possession of a certificate in English and in Table 3 students’ English competence (*EC*) scores. In Table 3 (Appendix 3) students’ scores in the proficiency test are presented. Lastly, in Appendix 4 scores in our tailor-made *C quiz* aiming for measuring intercultural awareness (*C*) can be viewed.

Most students in particular assessed themselves as having a *Good* level of English (52.8%) and as being *Basically trained* at 47.2%. Only 3.2% assessed themselves as having a *Very Poor* English level; as for their self-reported intercultural training, the *Not trained at all* option reached 4% (Appendix 1). Concerning students' certification in English in Table 2, the vast majority at 86% answered they had a certificate while only 14% did not. Coming to students' scores in the English proficiency test in Table 3, the majority of students were found to belong to the advanced (C1) CEFR level at 36%, while the C2 proficient level students were merely 1.6%. Moving on to our proposed *C quiz* using cultural scripts, as it can be seen in Table 3 most students scored only 1 correct item (39.2%) while no student out of 125 found all 7 correct answers. It could be said then that results of the *Pilot EC_C Questionnaire* revealed that, on the one hand, students were equipped with General English knowledge, yet their cognitive level of intercultural awareness did not match the reported linguistic proficiency. Such finding appears to contradict previous research which showed that linguistic and intercultural competences are positively correlated (Noble et al. 2011 for an overview of previous studies). Further and safer conclusions will be drawn once the results of our tailor-made *EC_C Questionnaire* are also published, meaning Stages 3 and 5 of the doctoral study of the second author, always ensuring respondents' anonymity.

All in all, the majority of students were found to belong to the advanced (C1) CEFR level of English at 36%, while the C2 proficient level students were merely 1.6%. Moving on to our proposed *C quiz* using cultural scripts, most students scored only 1 correct item (39.2%) while no student out of a total 125 found all 7 correct answers.

Discussion

One possible limitation could be that students' levels of English varied because a certificate of English as a Foreign Language was not mandatory for being matriculated at the HMMA. Thus, a lot of them might have faced difficulties in the *EC test* and could have required more time to complete the Questionnaire. Another limitation is that I could not develop descriptive levels for the assessment of *C* like the Council of Europe (2001, 2020) pose for language proficiency. This is because based on the Council of Europe (2020): "*The boundaries between knowledge of the world, sociocultural knowledge and intercultural awareness are not really clear-cut, as the CEFR 2001 explains.*" (p. 251). Despite these acknowledged limitations, and to the best of our knowledge, there has not been any instrument to measure *C* quantitatively. Also, the HMMA student population has not been researched before in terms of their students' *EC* in relation to their *C*. Last but not least, it should be made clear that it had never been our intention to question HMMA graduates' seamanship, only for the second author to help her students in the best possible way given the demanding living and working conditions on multicultural vessels.

Conclusion

An exhaustive presentation of the second author's doctoral study cannot be confined within the limits of the present article. However, its major aspects were discussed here so as to facilitate the reader comprehend the reasons underlying her choices. I attempted to grasp my students' needs by asking them in the *ICC survey* this question: "Do you want to learn more about the cultures with which you are said to embark more frequently? For example, the Filipino culture, the Russian culture, the Chinese culture". After listening to the needs of the majority of students and given that the study curriculum of the HMMA did not seem to provide students with intercultural training - the Hellenic Government Gazette, FEK, issue B' 2321/13.06.2019 and the syllabus of Maritime English for the Deck Department in particular, I searched for means to measure intercultural awareness (C) so as to see which amendments in the language curriculum could be suggested to practitioners, simultaneously satisfying students' self-reported needs. This doctoral study could be said to pave the way for similar research designs. Our proposed *C quiz* along with the *EC quiz* were the crux of the *EC_C_Questionnaire*. Before being established as an international tool for the measurement of C, our instrument could be subject to improvements, and it is for that reason we are open to suggestions and constructive criticism.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Table 1. Students' self-assessment on English Competence (EC) and intercultural training (IC)

Semester	N of students that assessed themselves with Excellent level of English (EC)	% per Semester	N of students that assessed themselves as Sufficiently trained intercultural (IC)	% per Semester
A (N = 37)	2	5.4%	2	5.4%
B (N = 44)	5	11.4%	10	22.8%
E (N = 44)	3	6.8%	11	25%
= 125	10	8%	23	18.4%
	N of students that assessed themselves with Very Good level of English (EC)	% per Semester	N of students that assessed themselves as Well trained intercultural (IC)	% per Semester

A (N = 37)	13	35.1%	6	16.2%
B (N = 44)	6	14%	9	20.5%
E (N = 44)	14	32%	14	31.8%
= 125	33	26.4%	29	23.2%
	N of students that assessed themselves with Good level of English (EC)	% per Semester	N of students that assessed themselves as Basically trained interculturally (IC)	% per Semester
A (N = 37)	19	51.3%	23	62.2%
B (N = 44)	23	52.2%	20	45.5%
E (N = 44)	24	54.5%	16	36.4%
= 125	66	52.8%	59	47.2%
	N of students that assessed themselves with Poor level of English (EC)	% per Semester	N of students that assessed themselves as Not well trained interculturally (IC)	% per Semester
A (N = 37)	2	5.4%	3	8.1%
B (N = 44)	8	18.2%	4	9.1%
E (N = 44)	2	4.5%	2	4.5%
= 125	12	9.6%	9	7.2%
	N of students that assessed themselves with Very Poor level of English (EC)	% per Semester	N of students that assessed themselves as Not trained at all interculturally (IC)	% per Semester
A (N = 37)	1	2.7%	3	8.1%
B (N = 44)	2	4.5%	1	2.3%
E (N = 44)	1	2.3%	1	2.3%
= 125	4	3.2%	5	4%
	Total N = 125	Total : 100%	Total N = 125	Total : 100%

Appendix 2

Table 2. Students' self-report on Certificates in English

Semester	Yes Certificate	%	No Certificate	%	Total %
A = 37	31	84%	6	16%	100%
B = 44	35	80%	9	20%	100%
E = 44	38	86%	6	14%	100%
Total N = 125	104	83%	21	17%	100%

Appendix 3

Table 3. Students' measurement of English Competence (EC): scores in the proficiency test

Semester	N of students with C2 CEFR level (49/49)	% per Semester
A (N = 37)	0	0
B (N = 44)	1	2.3%
E (N = 44)	1	2.3%
	2	1.6%
	N of students with C1 CEFR level (44 – 48)	% per Semester
A (N = 37)	16	43.2%
B (N = 44)	14	32%
E (N = 44)	15	34%
	45	36%
	N of students with B2 CEFR level (39 – 43)	% per Semester
A (N = 37)	11	30%
B (N = 44)	7	16%
E (N = 44)	16	36.4%
	34	27.2%
	N of students with B1 CEFR level (35 – 38)	% per Semester
A (N = 37)	1	2.7%
B (N = 44)	5	11.4%
E (N = 44)	4	9.1%
	10	8%
	N of students with A2 CEFR level (30 – 34)	% per Semester
A (N = 37)	5	14%
B (N = 44)	3	6.8%
E (N = 44)	1	2.3%
	9	7.2%
	N of students with A1 CEFR level (0 – 29)	% per Semester
A (N = 37)	4	11%
B (N = 44)	14	32%
E (N = 44)	7	16%
	25	20%
Total N = 125		100%

Appendix 4
Table 4. Students' measurement of intercultural awareness (C): scores in C quiz

Semester	Students who scored 7	%	Students who scored 6	%	Students who scored 5	%	Students who scored 4	%	Students who scored 3	%	Students who scored 2	%	Students who scored 1	%	N of agents who scored 0	%	Total %
A (N = 37)	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.702%	7	18.918%	8	21.621%	17	45.945%	4	10.810%	99.99%
B (N = 44)	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	4.545%	7	15.909%	18	40.909%	17	38.636%	99.99%
E (N = 44)	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	2.3%	6	13.6%	11	25%	14	32%	12	27.3%	99.95%
Total N = 125	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	1.6%	15	12%	26	20.8%	49	39.2%	33	26.4%	100%

Table 4 (continued)

Students who scored 0	%	Total %
4	10.810%	99.99%
17	38.636%	99.99%
12	27.3%	99.95%
33	26.4%	100%

Appendix 5

Our proposed tool for the measuring of intercultural awareness, the so-called *C quiz*

Of which culture is the cultural value in #1 more characteristic;

#1 [people think like this:] it is good if a person wants other people to know what this person thinks (...)

a) Russian b) Korean c) Filipino d) Indian

1. Of which culture is the cultural value in #2 more characteristic;

#2 [people think like this:] it is good if a person wants other people to know what this person feels

a) Filipino b) Indian c) Russian d) Korean

2. Of which culture is the cultural value in #3 more characteristic;

#3 [people think like this:] when a person does something, it is good if this person can think like this: "I am doing this because I want to do it"

a) Anglo b) German c) Russian d) Swedish

3. Of which culture is the cultural value in #4 more characteristic;

#4 [people think like this:] when I am with some people, I have to think like this: "this person is not someone like me this person is someone above me (...)

a) Korean b) Chinese c) Russian d) Filipino

4. Of which culture is the cultural value in #5 more characteristic;

#5 [people think like this:] when I am with some people, I have to think like this: (...) if this person says to me: "I want you to do something", I can't say to them: "I don't want to do it" (...)

- a) Filipino b) Korean c) Chinese d) Indian
-

5. Of which culture is the cultural value in #6 more characteristic;

#6 [people think like this:] when I want someone to do something it can be good if I say something like this to this person: 'maybe you will want to think about it maybe if you think about it you will want to do it'

- a) German b) Chinese c) Anglo d) Japanese
-

6. Of which culture is the cultural value in #7 more characteristic;

#7 often when someone feels something very good because something very good happens to this someone, it is not good if other people can know this when they see this someone's 'face'

- a) Korean b) Chinese c) Anglo d) German
-

7. Of which culture is the cultural value in #8 more characteristic;

#8 often when someone feels something very bad because something very bad happens to this someone, it is not good if other people can know this when they see this someone's 'face'

- a) Japanese b) Chinese c) Anglo d) German
-

8. Of which culture is the cultural value in #9 more characteristic;

#9 [people think like this:] when I want someone to do something it is not good if I say something like this to this person: 'I want you to do it I think that you will do it because of this'

- a) Black English b) Anglo c) Bulgarian d) Russian
-

9. Of which culture is the cultural value in #10 more characteristic;

#10 People think: everyone can do what he/she wants to do if it is not bad for other people

- a) Anglo b) Malaysian c) Ukrainian d) Japanese
-

10. Of which culture is the cultural value in #11 more characteristic;

#11 People think: it is good if someone can say things like these to people: I know what it is good for you to do; it will be good if you do this

- a) Malaysian b) Romanian c) Korean d) Chinese
-

11. Of which culture is the cultural value in #12 more characteristic;

#12 People think: if something bad happens to someone because of me, I have to say something like this to this person: "I feel something bad because of this"

- a) Korean b) Black English c) Anglo d) Japanese
-

12. Of which culture is the cultural value in #13 more characteristic;

#13 People think: it is not good if, when I say something to someone, this person feels something bad; because of this, when I want to say something to someone, it is good to think about it for some time before I say it

- a) Swedish b) Bulgarian c) Russian d) Malaysian
-

13. Of which culture is the cultural value in #14 more characteristic;

#14 if I say something like this to someone: "I think this", I can't say something like this at the same time: "I want you to think the same" "it is good to think this"

- a) Chinese b) Romanian c) Anglo d) Ukrainian
-

14. Of which culture is the cultural value in #15 more characteristic;

#15 when I want to say something like this to someone: "I think this", I want to say something like this at the same time: "I want you to think the same" "it is good to think this"

- a) Black English b) Anglo c) Russian d) Pakistani
-

15. Of which culture is the cultural value in #16 more characteristic;

#16 if someone wants to say about something: "when I think about it, I think like this", it is good if this someone can say it, it is bad if someone can't say it

- a) Anglo b) Chinese c) Swedish d) Bulgarian
-

16. Of which culture is the cultural value in #17 more characteristic;

#17 when someone says about something "I think about it like this", it is good if this someone says at the same time: "I don't say: I know this I know that someone else can think not like this"

- a) Malaysian b) Russian c) Anglo d) Black English
-

17. Of which culture is the cultural value in #18 more characteristic;

#18 at many times, it is good if someone wants to say to someone else: "I think like this now"

- a) Ukrainian b) Russian c) Chinese d) Korean
-

18. Of which culture is the cultural value in #19 more characteristic;

#19 if someone feels some things when this someone is saying something to someone else it is good if this other someone can know it

- a) Japanese b) Chinese c) Korean d) Russian
-

19. Of which culture is the cultural value in #20 more characteristic;

#20 it is good if a person says something to someone else because this person wants to say what this person thinks not because of anything else

- a) Russian b) Chinese c) Black English d) Malaysian

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