

Features of Language Acquisition Strategies and Their Role in Maritime English Learning and Teaching

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Abstract

Introduction and aim: The English language as the most important language all over the world and respectively is represented as the major working language in many fields of professions. The language learners with strong literacy skills in English have success in social communications and the job market. Thus, promoting language learners and students' literacy development in the English language is a key issue in the system of education. The presented paper provides an overview of the peculiarities of language learning strategies and their significant place in the process of language learning and teaching for foreign language learners and teachers (bringing the survey of the international conventional requirements for seafarers' English language competence, based on the analysis of the International Maritime Organization-developed Model Course 3.17 "Maritime English", the interviews with acting seafarers and crewing companies managers and the policy of Maritime English implementation at Batumi State Maritime Academy). The paper summarizes the background of language learning strategies, defines the concept of a language learning strategy, and outlines some main types of language learning strategies proposed by several researchers. The paper deals with the importance of the learning strategies for foreign language learners in order to improve the literacy skills in English and ensure appropriate success in both social communications and the job market.

Research methodology: Statistical, comparative.

Results and implications: Maritime English teaching strategy tuning to the skills-oriented study.

Conclusion: The main outcomes of the research provide the teachers of Maritime English with the strategies and policies of the conventionally oriented skills development.

Keywords: language learning strategy, target language, cognitive, metacognitive, socioaffective, self-efficacy, home languages, interests, motivation, learning effort, literacy learning

The English language has firmly established itself as the most important language in the world. It is clear for anyone that knowing this language we can avoid many difficulties concerning to the language barriers in communication and get as much necessary information as possible by using various internet and/or other sources. So, based on the above mentioned point of view, we can add that the English language is the major working language in many fields of social activity with national and/or multinational society. If a person wants to be successful he/she should have strong literacy skills in English. The similar situation is in Georgia. As a consequence, Georgian students need strong literacy skills in English to succeed in schools, universities and beyond. Students, who fail to acquire these skills, will find themselves at a serious disadvantage in both social communications and the job market. Thus, promoting language learners and students' literacy development in the English language is a key issue in the system of education. To achieve the goal we should make the

intervention more focused and more suitable for our target students and correctly selected language learning strategy will help them greatly to achieve desired results.

As the example of above said, let us bring the policy of implementation of the international requirements, related with Maritime English educational process, providing recognition of Georgian maritime students on the international maritime labor market.

The use of the English language is increasingly becoming a mandatory requirement for all categories of seafarers.

Under the requirements of the convention, regulating safety of life at sea, on all ships, to ensure effective crew performance in safety matters, a working language shall be established and recorded in the ship's log-book.

The International Safety Management Code also stipulates the need for seafarers to communicate in a common language. Taking into account the fact that the same regulations require that on ships English shall be used on the bridge as the working language for bridge-to-bridge and bridge-to-shore safety communications as well as for communications on board between the pilot and bridge watchkeeping personnel.

The Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers requires adequate knowledge of the English language to enable the officer to use: charts and other nautical publications, to understand meteorological information and messages concerning ship's safety and operation, to communicate with other ships, coast stations and VTS centers and to perform the officer's duties also with a multilingual crew, including the ability to use and understand the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (the IMO SMCP).

There is no possibility within the frames of the paper to offer the assessment of all fields of Maritime English use; in order to highlight a critical importance of communication skills we'll present the typical onboard, ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore cases when the IMO SMCP provide adequate communication.

Distress communications cover the life-threatening cases of: fire, explosion, flooding, collision, grounding, list, danger of capsizing, sinking, disabled and adrift vessel, armed attack/piracy, undesignated distress, abandoning vessel and person overboard.

Search and Rescue communications include acknowledgement and/or relay of SAR messages, performing/coordinating and finishing with SAR operations.

Possible cases of trauma and illness are also provided with unified communications of requesting medical assistance.

Technical failure, cargo and ice damage are supported by the phrases "other than distress safety communication".

Meteorological and hydrological conditions such as: winds, storms, tropical storms, sea state, restricted visibility, ice and abnormal tides which actually define the development of the passage are provided with a necessary set of appropriate phrases.

Navigational warnings cover the phrases related to land or seamounts, drifting objects, electronic navigational aids, sea bottom characteristics, wrecks, cable, pipe and seismic/hydrographic operations, diving operations, tows, dredging operations, tanker transshipment, off-shore installations, defective locks or bridges, military operations, fishery.

Environmental protection phrases provide communications related to environment defense issues.

Pilotage related phrases include the following components: Pilot request, Embarking / disembarking pilot, tug request, helicopter operations.

Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) Standard Phrases cover the following components:

- Information service: Navigational warnings, Navigational information, Traffic information, Route information, Hydrographic information, Electronic navigational aids information.
- Navigational assistance service: Request and identification, Position, Course;
- Traffic organization service: Clearance, forward planning, Anchoring, Arrival, berthing and departure, Enforcement, Avoiding dangerous situations, providing safe movements.
- Phrases for communication with emergency services and allied services include emergency services (SAR, fire fighting, pollution fighting).

On-board communication phrases cover:

- Standard Wheel and Engine Orders;
- Situations related to Propulsion system, maneuvering, Radar, Draft and air draft, Anchoring - Going to anchor, Leaving the anchorage, Tug assistance, Berthing and unberthing.

Operative ship handling phrases include the following components:

- Briefing on position, movements and draft: Position, Movements, Draft, traffic situation in the area, navigational aids and equipment status, radio communications, meteorological conditions, standing orders and bridge organization, special navigational events, temperatures, pressures and soundings, operation of main engine and auxiliary equipment, pumping of fuel, ballast water, special machinery events, record keeping.

Occupational Safety: Instruction, Practical occupational safety, Occupational accidents

Fire protection and firefighting: Fire protection: Checking status of equipment, Firefighting and drills (reporting fire, Reporting readiness for action, Orders for firefighting, Cancellation of alarm).

Damage control: Checking equipment status and drills, Damage control activities (Reporting flooding, Reporting readiness for action, Orders for damage control, Cancellation of alarm)

Grounding: Reporting grounding and ordering actions, Reporting damage, Orders for refloating, Checking seaworthiness.

Search and Rescue on-board Activities: checking equipment status, Person-overboard activities, Rescue operation - reporting readiness for assistance, Conducting search, Rescue activities, Finishing with search and rescue operations.

Cargo and cargo handling includes loading and unloading: Loading capacities and quantities, Dockside/shipboard cargo handling gear and equipment, Preparing for loading / unloading, Operating cargo handling equipment and hatches, Maintaining/repairing cargo handling equipment, Briefing on stowing and securing.

Handling dangerous goods: Briefing on nature of dangerous goods, Instructions on compatibility and stowage, Reporting incidents, Action in case of incidents;

Handling liquid goods, bunkers and ballast pollution prevention: Preparing safety measures, Operating pumping equipment, Reporting and cleaning up spillage, Ballast handling, Tank cleaning.

That is why, each non-native English speaking seafarer is required to understand and, where appropriate, give orders and instructions and to report back in English.

Language learning strategies have been an important theme of research among the scientists over the past three decades. However, there is still no consensus about what language learning strategies actually are.

Oxford (1990) defines the language learning strategies as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations” (p. 8). Wenden and Rubin (1987:19) define learning strategies as "... any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage,

retrieval, and use of information." According to Richards and Platt (1992), learning strategies are "intentional behavior and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information", (p. 29) while Faerch Claus and Kasper (1983) define a learning strategy as "an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language."(p.67) According to Stern (1992), "the concept of learning strategy is dependent on the assumption that learners consciously engage in activities to achieve certain goals and learning strategies can be regarded as broadly conceived intentional directions and learning techniques."(p.61)

The importance of language learning strategies in language learning and teaching is great. The amount of information received by language learners is high in language classroom, and the learners use different language learning strategies in carrying out the tasks and progressing the new input they face. Language learning strategies are good indicators of how learners approach tasks or problems arisen or existed during the process of language learning.

As language learning includes different aspects such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, literacy learning strategies, based on its purpose, cannot be exactly the same.

Reading and writing are two basic literacy skills which are very important for language learners to get a proper place in modern society. Studies suggest that reading is actually a process which involves much strategic behavior on the part of the reader. According to Block and Duffy (2008), "Comprehension is a strategic process; that is, good readers proactively search for meaning as they read, using text cues and their background knowledge in combination to generate predictions, to monitor those predictions, to repredict when necessary, and generally to construct a representation of the author's meaning." (p. 21)

Writing is also a process which involves various strategic actions. According to Harris, Santangelo, and Graham (2010), "Writing is a recursive, strategic, and multidimensional process central to (1) planning what to say and how to say it, (2) translating ideas into written text, and (3) revising what has been written." (p. 226)

All language learners use language learning strategies either consciously or unconsciously when processing new information and performing tasks in the language classroom. At the same time, we should also take into account the information about their interest, self-efficacy, home and native languages, interest in reading and writing and out-of-school/university learning effort in English literacy learning.

Studies suggest that self-efficacy, motivation and effort play an important role in literacy learning and can be suggested as important literacy learning strategies. According to Schunk and Zimmerman (2007), "learners' level of self-efficacy can influence their choice of activities, effort expenditure, persistence, and achievement." (p. 22) According to Cole (2002) learners with positive self-efficacies feel a strong sense of control over their language learning process. Apart from self-efficacy, motivation and effort are also very important for language learners. Learners should initiate such kind of activities. They will better motivate themselves and be able to increase their learning skills. Teachers can teach students reading and writing strategies, but students may never reach their full potential if they do not have the motivation and they do not do adequate effort. Language learning strategies give language teachers valuable information about how their students assess the situation, plan, select appropriate skills so as to understand, learn, or remember new input presented in the language classroom.

Language learning strategies are used to oversee, regulate or self-direct language learning. They involve various processes as planning, prioritizing, setting goals, and self-management.

The number of learning strategies varies according to the various researches but there are generally three main types of learning strategies contributing directly to the development of the language system constructed by the learner:

- Cognitive Learning Strategies
- Metacognitive Learning Strategies
- Socioaffective strategies

According to Fedderholdt (1997), using a wide variety of language learning strategies is a good way to improve language skills. Metacognitive strategies improve organization of learning time, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. Cognitive strategies help to solve new problems by using previous knowledge. Socioaffective strategies mean that native speakers should correct their pronunciation and/or work properly on a particular language problem. Developing skills in three areas, such as metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective can help the language learner to build up learner independence and autonomy whereby he/she can take control of his own learning. As Oxford (1990) states, language learning strategies "... are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed movement, which is essential for developing communicative competence." (p.11)

The language teacher plays a very important role in strategy training. The language teacher, before using language learning strategies, should properly learn about the students, their interests, motivations, and learning styles. The teacher can learn which language learning strategies students already appear to be using, observing their behavior in class. The teacher can learn the purpose of their learning a language, to understand the reason why they learn a language. The language teacher should also study his/her own teaching method and overall classroom style. Analyzing his/her lesson plans, the language teacher can determine whether his/her lesson plans give learners chance to use a variety of learning styles and strategies or not. The language teacher should be able to evaluate himself/herself. This means that the teacher can focus better on language learning strategies and strategy training during the process of his/her teaching.

At the same time, involvement of the students as the co-instructors of the language teaching-learning process provides increasing of motivation and respectively the expected course outcomes.

As the example of incorporation of above stated strategies with the students' involvement into the language training process, let us bring a case study, illustrating the implementation of skills – oriented language teaching.

Having studied the safety-related cases, and taking into consideration the sinking of the MV Sewol occurred on 16 April, 2014 (297 dead), we directed the policy of BSMA students education and training towards to detection of the most often deficiencies happened on board the passenger ships despite all noted above efforts to prevent such tragedies.

In order to research the problems related to the passenger ship safety, still happening at sea, we studied the cases of the passenger ship accidents (happened in 2015-16):

- Drills and Crew Training Issues (25 occurrences): various deficiencies were issued for problems associated with crew training and drills. The deficiencies included crews' inability to communicate effectively during fire and abandon ship drills. There were also deficiencies written for crews that did not have the required STCW training for Crowd Control Management and Crisis Management.
- Problems with Lifeboats and Rescue Boats (21 occurrences);
- Improper Utilization of Categorized Spaces (17 occurrences);
- Problems with Fire Detection systems/Smoke Detection (13 occurrences);

- Fire Suppression Systems (12 occurrences);
- Issues with Pollution Prevention Equipment (9 occurrences);
- Emergency Lighting Issues (7 occurrences);
- Fuel and oil leaks (7 occurrences).

and the results of conducted analysis show that the most often deficiencies (25 cases) are related to crews' inability to operate to communicate effectively during different onboard drills.

That is why we decided to conduct the series of theoretical and practical trainings for a group of BSMA students (who pass their onboard training on the passenger ships of Tallink Grupp) to provide them with necessary communication skills) to provide them with necessary communication skills.

The novelty of the noted training is in involvement of the students (who also participated in research) into the teaching process in capacity of co-instructors of the trainings.



Figure 1. BSMA student acts as the co-teacher (the series of theoretical and practical trainings for a group of Batumi State Maritime Academy students (who pass their onboard training on the passenger ships of Tallink Grupp) to provide them with necessary communication skills.)

As the basis of the briefing and instruction we used the appropriate IMO SMCP which help the Masters, officers and crew members of passenger vessels and passenger ferries to inform passengers on safety aspects and to manage them in case of an emergency.

We provided the group with communications skills giving possibility to inform the passengers how they should conduct on board.

Use of the phrases the group should be able to deliver regulations concerning the vessel's routine to be obeyed.

We also provided them with the speech skills on briefing on prohibited areas, decks, and spaces and warned that safety regulations do not permit passengers to enter the following spaces:

- navigating bridge
- engine room
- maneuvering areas at the front and back end of the vessel
- cargo rooms and compartments
- service rooms

- all areas and spaces marked "Crew only"
- all closed, sealed or roped off areas, spaces and rooms
- car decks when the vessel is at sea.

Then we continued with the passenger care and used the phrases which help Masters, officers and crew members of passenger vessels and passenger ferries to inform passengers on safety aspects and to manage them in case of an emergency.

We provided instructions on how to embark and behave in lifeboats / liferafts



Figure 2. BSMA student acts as the co-teacher (the series of theoretical and practical trainings for a group of Batumi State Maritime Academy students (who pass their onboard training on the passenger ships of Tallink Grupp) to provide them with necessary communication skills.)

We warned that the crew member should inform that passengers that they should:

- Enter the lifeboat / liferaft only when ordered by an officer / lifeboatman.
- Clear the entrance of the lifeboat / liferaft immediately after entering.
- Not to push each other when entering the lifeboat / liferaft.
- Hold on to ropes or to their seat when lowering / hoisting.
- Keep their lifejackets on.
- Know that provisions and drinking water will be distributed by an officer / lifeboatman only.
- Strictly obey all instructions given by the officer / lifeboatman.
- Remember that discipline in the lifeboat / liferaft is of vital importance.

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Then we delivered communication provision of instruction about the on scene measures and actions in lifeboats/liferafts for the passenger ship crew. Using appropriate SMCP they will be able to:

- Keep a sharp lookout for persons in the water.
- Have a line/hook/knife/lifebuoy ready.
- Pump out the water / free the lifeboat / liferaft from water.
- Be informed about the ration of provisions and water.
- Know about the danger related to drinking sea water.
- Use the fire rockets and smoke buoys.
- to join the other lifeboats / liferafts.



Figure 3. BSMA student acts as the co-teacher (the series of theoretical and practical trainings for a group of Batumi State Maritime Academy students (who pass their onboard training on the passenger ships of Tallink Grupp) to provide them with necessary communication skills.)

We also offered briefing on safety regulations, preventive measures and communications providing familiarization of the passengers with their assembly stations, life-saving equipment and emergency procedures.

Communication provision of:

- preventing and reporting fire
- Person overboard
- Protective measures for children

We also offered communication provision of Evacuation and Boat Drill when allocating / directing to assembly stations and describing how to escape.



Figure 4. a group of BSMA student provided with the series of theoretical and practical trainings, ready to pass their onboard training on the passenger ships of Tallink Grupp.

Thus, using the provided communication skills it becomes possible to explain the passengers that in case of the general emergency alarm is sounded, which consists of seven short blasts and one prolonged blast, all passengers have to go to their assembly station, take their lifejackets and blankets with them, put on warm clothing, long trousers, long sleeved shirts / jackets, strong shoes and head covering.

Taking into account the results of the conducted analysis and implemented training we want to pay special attention to the ways of the possible accident prevention:

The crew of the passenger ship should be able to use the appropriate part of the IMO SMCP: "Passenger Care"

The onboard crew safety drills should be strictly implemented using the appropriate IMO phrases, giving possibility to train the multinational crew members to perform their duties without communication failure.

Conclusion

All language learners use language learning strategies in the learning process. Since the factors like age, gender, personality, motivation, self-concept, life-experience, learning style, excitement, anxiety, etc. affect the way in which language learners learn the target language. It is not reasonable to assert the idea that all language learners use the same good language learning strategies or should be trained in using and developing the same strategies to become successful learners but it is impossible to imagine the target language learning process without using the language learning strategies. Language learning strategies are used to oversee, regulate or self-direct language learning. Language learning strategies give language teachers valuable information about how their students assess the situation, plan, select appropriate skills so as to understand, learn, or remember new input presented in the language classroom. One prerequisite is that teachers need to be well-acquainted with the useful strategies that can potentially raise the level of student awareness of the utility of a strategy-based approach. The teacher expertise is an extremely

important factor in successful pedagogical practice, and we can suggest that it is equally, if not more, significant in implementing an innovative pedagogical intervention.

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