

USING MEANING-FOCUSED OUTPUT STRAND IN DIALOGIC MEANING CONSTRUCTION OF SEASPEAK

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to describe features of Seaspeak and suggests a way of teaching this specific kind of communication to learners by using a strategy which is called meaning-focused output strand that incorporates the productive skills of writing and speaking. This strategy is intended to raise learners' *form awareness* typical of seaspeak which has a set of constraints of language use of closed register distinctive from that of daily communication. Seaspeak is transactional in nature, involving intership and intraship communication. Intership communication involves a vessel's OOW and VTS when the ship is about to berth, cast off, load or discharge. Learners at Politeknik Ilmu Pelayaran need to be well-equipped with how to successfully deal with such a communication encountered later as seafarers. One way of achieving this is by having them actively involved in a dialogic meaning construction with their peers in a collaborative manner. Meaning focused output strand provides them with activities that enable them to benefit from the feedback and correction they get during the joint construction of a maritime discourse from their fellow learners.

Keywords: seaspeak, meaning-focused output strand, dialogic meaning construction, form awareness,

INTRODUCTION

Seaspeak or maritime communication deals with communication between: (1) vessels and coast-stations, (2) intership communication and (3) intraship communication (internal communication when the ship is berthing, casting off, leaving berth, loading or discharging, etc.). Vessel and coast stations can communicate by means of radio telephony, satellite, Digital Selective Calling (DSC) and Radio Telex.

Categories of messages that can be transmitted and received are called "Priorities". They indicate the importance of the messages. Priorities which are found in seaspeak can be classified as follows:

- (1) A **distress alert** which indicates that there is serious and immediate danger for vessel, crew and passengers. A distress alert is also referred to as a "MAYDAY" message.
- (2) An **urgency message** which indicates that there is serious danger for vessel, crew and

passengers. An urgency message is also referred to as a "PAN PAN" message.

- (3) A **safety message** which indicates that there is imminent risk for navigation. A safety message is also referred to as a "SECURITE" message.
- (4) A **routine message** which is transmitted to ensure safe navigation. Routine messages include: (a) intership communication, (b) exchange of data in port operation, (c) communication between ships and Vessel Traffic Services (VTS), inshore radar stations, pilot stations, bridges and locks.

The paper offers an alternative teaching-learning strategy that aims at equipping learners with communicative skills when they are engaged in the transmission of a routine message between ships and VTS. The strategy is in the form of **meaning-focused output engagement**. Such a strategy involves learning through speaking and writing in which learners are

supposed to use language productively (Nation, 2007:4) which can be employed provided the following conditions are present:

- (1) The learners write and talk about things that are largely familiar to them.
- (2) Their main goal is to convey their message to someone else.
- (3) Only a small proportion of the language they need to use is not familiar to them
- (4) The learners can use communication strategies, dictionaries or previous input to make up the gaps in their productive knowledge.
- (5) There are plenty of opportunities to speak and write.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The course in Maritime English is designed to help learners develop their communicative competence in English to a level that will enable them to satisfy the competences related to the English language set out in the STCW 1995 Code. The concept that highlights the specific requirements of the Standard of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarer (STCW) 1995 Code is that seafarers need to be competent in using English for professional purposes. Consequently Maritime English focuses on the specific characteristics of the English language used in transactional spoken exchanges. In this context it addresses the language needs of seaspeak, which is a distinctive type of spoken discourse that can be said to share the spatial or interpersonal distance of telephone talk in the sense that, according to Eggins (1994:54), it (1) lacks visual contact, (2) is aural, (3) has immediate feedback.

It can be further described that the typical situations of language use found in seaspeak are (1) interactive, involving two or more participants, (2) not face-to-face, (3) language as action, in

which language is used to accomplish some tasks, (4) not spontaneous, and (5) non-casual.

Moreover, unlike casual conversations, seaspeak lacks features of politeness markers in the form of hedges, indirect, incongruent mood realization of speech acts and implicature.

From the interpersonal function of language (tenor) that reveals the social role relationships played by participants (Eggins, 1994: 63) seaspeak can be classified as having formal setting which commonly reveals *unequal, hierarchic power, infrequent*, or *one-off* contact, low affective involvement. Yet, seaspeak as an institutional talk which is formal in nature, **cannot be said** to be **unequal** or **asymmetrical** since both participants (1) employ the same communicative strategy which is direct, (2) without any interpersonal exchange before they get right down to business.

THE FEATURES OF SEASPEAK CLOSED REGISTER

Seaspeak which belongs to closed register has the following distinctive features: (1) The summon-attention getting signal, (2) Ritualized opening move, (3) Ritualized turn-over signal, (4) Use of message markers

Human communication fulfils many different goals at the personal and social levels. In our daily interactions we communicate ideas, beliefs, emotions, attitudes and information to one another. In that way, we construct and maintain our position within various social contexts by employing appropriate language forms and performing speech activities to build, for instance, solidarity, harmony, and cooperation as needed. In the process of communication participants create a text either spoken or written, which is structured in such a way in unfolding sequence of communication.

The opening moves in maritime talk function as attention getting signal addressing the intended hearer. The channel opening signal is in the form of a **summon** by calling the addressee's name called out three times followed by self identification (port to vessel or vice versa). The summon is repeated three times to make sure the intended addressee that she/he is the one being addressed to. The self-identification is also repeated three times to enable the addressee recognize the caller easily. The response is the form of identification of the two participants to establish the communication that will follow. This practice has become a **ritualized opening move** of maritime talk, with no exchange of greetings (in terms of what we recognize as greetings in daily conversation like hello, good morning, etc.) between the two participants.

Maritime talk has no close signal in the form of leave-taking signals. When the intended business has been carried out completely participants simply end the communication. It neither has backchannel signals which are found in face-to-face communication. In terms of turn-over signals, seaspeak has a **ritualized turn-over signal "OVER"** indicating that it is the hearer's turn to take the floor. Every move made by each participant is ended by the word **over** as a turnover signal that is not found in face-to-face daily communication. The signal provides cue for the addressee to begin the next move or take the floor.

In maritime talk, there is a fixed procedure to ascertain the clearness quality of the transmitted sound or message by asking the addressee **"How you read me?"** in order to find out whether or not they can continue the communication encounter using the current channel being used. If the answer is **"I read you good"** they can go on to the next exchanges. In

addition to it, in order to be correctly interpretable, the contents of the message are made explicit by using **message markers** put at the initial position of every move made by each of the participants in the form of **illocutionary** verbs like: **advice, information, question** and **answer**.

Seaspeak does not display **pre-empt signals** since the communication is managed in orderly manner in which there is no overlap of turn-taking between participants. Pre-empt signals refer to any interruption of the on-going channel message.

In line with the four major Gricean norms of **cooperation, relevance, truthfulness, quantity** and **clarity**, seaspeak observes them all without any violation. Each move is relevant to what comes before and what is expected to follow. The maxim of truthfulness is seen in all exchanges made as expected to happen in institutional, formal conversation. Meanwhile, the maxim of quantity is guaranteed by the business-like, straightforward exchanges that provides no room for such kind of interpersonal exchanges.

In seaspeak, the **maxim of clarity** is made salient by the use of message markers. The markers help avoid obscurity and ambiguity to assure clarity of messages. All four Grice's maxims are important for effective communication. Controls on manner (clarity), quality (relevance and truthfulness), and quantity (enough and not too much) are important for communication to run smoothly. To visualize the features described above, below is a model dialog of a routine message in the form of intership communication:

Communication between MV Batavia (B) and Surabaya Port Control (SPC)

B: Surabaya Port Control, Surabaya Port Control, Surabaya Port Control, this is Batavia, Batavia, Batavia, Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo
How do you read me – over.

SPC: MV. Batavia, Batavia, Batavia, Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo this is Surabaya Port control, Surabaya Port Control, Surabaya Port Control. I read you good. Please change to channel 7 0 – over.

B: Surabaya Port Control this is Batavia, Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo.
Changing to channel 7 0 – over.

SPC: MV Batavia Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo this is Surabaya Port Control.
What is your intention – over.

B: Surabaya Port Control this is Batavia, Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo.
My intention is to berth at Surabaya Port Main Basin berth number 1.
Question. Must I take tugs – over.

SPC. MV Batavia Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo this is Surabaya Port Control.
Answer. You have permission to berth at Main Basin berth number 1.
You must take two tugs according to Port Regulations – over.

B: Surabaya Port Control this is Batavia Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo.
Question. In what position tugs will meet me – over.

SPC: MV Batavia Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo. This is Surabaya Port Control.
Answer. Tugs will meet you in position 0 decimal 5 nautical miles south of Main Basin – over.

B: Surabaya Port Control this is Batavia Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo
Question. Must I take my towing lines – over.

SPC: MV Batavia Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo. This is Surabaya Port Control.
Answer. Yes, you must take your towing lines.
Advice. Reduce your speed to three knots for fastening tugs.

B: Surabaya Port Control this is Baltic Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo.
Answer. Reducing speed to 3 knots.
Standing by for tugs on channel 14 – over.

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) AND MEANING-FOCUSED OUTPUT STRAND (MFOS)

The principles of communicative language teaching methodology, according to Richards (2006:13) can be summarised as follows.

- (1) Make real communication the focus of language learning.
- (2) Provide opportunities for learners to experiment and try out what they know.
- (3) Be tolerant of learners' errors as they indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence.
- (4) Provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency.
- (5) Link the different skills such as speaking, reading, and listening together, since they usually occur so in the real world.
- (6) Let students include or discover grammar rules.

CTL should provide learners with opportunities to create meaningful communication in their discursive construction in which they can actively practice the language use which is relevant to their the communicative encounters of their future vocational or professional life. Since we mostly use language in communicating with others, it will be beneficial for language learners to be involved in collaborative learning activities. In this suggested approach they are to work in pairs when they can practice language together, study a text, research language, or take part in information-gap activities. They can write dialogues, predict the content of reading texts, or compare notes on what they have listened to or seen. According to Hammer (2003), pair work has the following advantages.

- (1) It dramatically increases the amount of speaking time any one learner gets in the class.
- (2) It allows learners to work and interact independently without the necessary guidance of the teacher, thus promoting learner independence.
- (3) It allows teachers time to work with one or two pairs while the other learners continue working.
- (4) It recognises the old maxim that 'two heads are better than one', and in promoting cooperation helps the classroom to become a more relaxed friendly place. If we get learners to make decision in pairs (such as deciding on the correct answers to questions about a reading text), we allow them to share responsibility rather than having to bear the whole weight themselves.
- (5) It is relatively quick and easy to organise.

The usual classroom practice of teaching maritime English up to now has been: (1) **presenting** a pre-record model dialog (listening), (2) asking learners to **practice** the dialog (speaking practice) to be memorized, and (3) giving correction and feedback concerning pronunciation mistakes. The results of such a practice has been unsatisfactory because learners seem to have failed to observe both the generic features of maritime talk and its constraints as well as its lexico-grammatical features when they have to **produce** a given maritime talk. This PPP strategy seems to have failed to raise awareness of language use in a given re

The paper attempts to suggest a creative approach of enabling learners to engage successfully in creating spoken discourse of maritime communication (seaspeak) by allowing them to experience negotiation exchanges in the

form of gap-filling exercises that precedes a role play.

Differing from the traditional PPP strategy, the MPOS start with:

- (1) Having learners collaboratively construct an incomplete dialog taken from an authentic material of maritime talk.
- (2) Working in pairs, they are to write down the information gaps by using the clues provided. Writing can be used to produce various kinds of written texts as the output of group projects. Moreover, what is written down can be used to support speaking – at the same time speaking helps to generate what is written down. The use of writing facilitates focus on linguistic form: as has been observed, there is an important sense in which literacy is metalinguistic activity. This activity is timed, the length of which varies based on the task to be completed.
- (3) Next, after they have finished writing the missing parts of the dialog, they are given opportunities to practise first with their

partners before presenting their work to the class. If the class is big, having more than 30 learners, it will be time consuming to ask all of the pairs to take turns speaking while the rest are listening. There will be no time left for discussion and feedback, and obviously it can be boring for them. To overcome this, in a lesson, the teacher can invite – five pairs speaking one by one followed by feedback and correction.

The feedback can be in the form of having learners listen to the original pre recorded authentic material. While doing this, they can check their written work and correct any mistakes they have made. When this activity is done, they are to practise speaking the real version of the dialog in pairs. At this stage the teacher can supervise the activity and ready to offer help as necessary.

Described below is an exercise to be practised. The suggested strategy I offer is open to any revision and criticism for a better learning outcome.

DESCRIPTION

Container vessel MV Batavia is steering east to Surabaya Fairway, south entrance. Her speed is 12 knots. Position is 15 nm west from buoy 'Surabaya'. There aren't any restrictions by crossing and outgoing ships.

Principal particulars of MV Batavia: call sign: DELTA, HOTEL, DELTA, BRAVO; flag state: Indonesia, length: 218m, beam 32m, 45696 tons deadweight, speed-12kn, owner – Djakarta Lloyd Shipping Company, Jakarta. Destination – Surabaya.

INSTRUCTION

Work with your partner, complete the dialog below by using the provided clues. You have 15 minutes to do it. When you have finished, practise the dialog by taking turns as the VTS officer on duty (SPC) and Batavia radio officer.

B:

1 _____

2 _____

(1. Open call to Surabaya Port Control and inform vessel's identity and call sign. 2. Question the clearness quality of the transmitted message)

SPC: MV Batavia, Batavia, Batavia, Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo this is Surabaya Port Control, Surabaya port control, Surabaya port control. I read you good. Please change to channel 7 0 – over.

B:

1 _____
2 _____

(1. Reconfirming the Addressee's and Vessel's identity and call sign. 2. Informing the undertaking of Surabaya's Instruction to change channel)

SPC: MV Batavia Delta Hotel, Delta, Bravo, this is Surabaya Port Control. What is intention – over.

B:

1 _____
2 _____
3. _____

(1.Reconfirming the addressee's and vessel's identity and call sign. 2. Informing the purpose to berth. 3. Asking if the vessel must take tugs)

SPC: MV Batavia Delta, Hotel, Delta, Bravo this is Surabaya Port Control.

Answer. You have the permission to berth at Main Basin number 1.
You must take two tugs according to port regulations – over.

B:

1 _____
2 _____

(1. Reconfirming the addressee's and Vessel's identity and call sign. 2. Ask whether it must take the towing lines.)

SPC: MV Batavia Delta, Hotel, Delta Bravo. This is Surabaya Port Control.

Answer. Yes, you must take your towing lines.
Advice. Reduce your speed to three knots for fastening tugs.

B:

1 _____
2 _____
3. _____

(1. Reconfirming the addressee's and vessel's identity and call sign. 2. Informing the undertaking of the advice given. 3. Informing the standby position for tugs on channel 14)

CONCLUSION

This strategy can be used to prove whether what have been claimed that learners learn best from their mistakes. By shifting from starting a lesson

by giving learners with language input first, this suggested strategy starts with asking them to produce language output. In the process of doing this, when they notice there are mismatches of

their output and they are given feedback and correction, the feedback and correction become input for them that can help learning take place.

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