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## THE ROLE OF IMO STANDARD MARINE COMMUNICATION PHRASES IN SAFETY OF NAVIGATION AT SEA

**Bialyk O.Ye., Candidate of Science,**  
Lecturer of English department № 2  
*National University «Odesa Maritime Academy»*

### **Bialyk O.Ye. THE ROLE OF IMO STANDARD MARINE COMMUNICATION PHRASES IN SAFETY OF NAVIGATION AT SEA**

The article analyzes characteristics of Maritime English, describes the structure peculiarities and principles of usage of Standard Marine Communication Phrases, adopted by International Maritime Organization, and their impact on ensuring effective communication at sea, thus supporting safe navigation.

**Key words:** Maritime English, standard phrases, effective communication at sea.

У статті проаналізовані характеристики морської англійської мови, описані особливості структури та принципи використання стандартних фраз для спілкування в морі, прийнятих міжнародною морською організацією, та їх вплив на забезпечення ефективної комунікації в морі.

**Ключові слова:** морська англійська мова, стандартні фрази, спілкування в морі, ефективна комунікація.

В статье проанализированы отличительные характеристики морского английского языка, описаны особенности структуры и принципы использования стандартных фраз для общения в море, принятых международной морской организацией, и их влияние на обеспечение эффективной коммуникации в море.

**Ключевые слова:** морской английский язык, стандартные фразы, общение в море, эффективная коммуникация.

Globalization of the shipping industry and application of modern technologies on board vessels demand a high level of education, training and certification of seafarers. The significance of English language, as a working language of the international shipping industry is totally uncontroversial. Maritime English has several definitions given by different researchers and academics who are specialized within ME, here are two of them:

Maritime English is an entirety of all these methods of the English language in which, being used as a method for communication within the international maritime industry, contribute to the safety of navigation and the facilitation of the seaborne trade [5, p. 11].

Another definition implies that Maritime English as linguistically, not an independent language but just a unoriginal marker for a subgroup or recognition of English language applicable, in our case, to a specific maritime situation (e.g. in the act of navigation, in a close-quarters situation, a cargo handling operation, an act of reading operational or maintenance manual for the auxiliary engine, etc.), used in a specific context or situation (i.e. in maritime speech community, in speech events influenced by a number of factors sending / receiving the message or spoken contact with in maritime communication)" [3, p. 192].

The fact is that knowledge of professional vocabulary and ability to communicate freely when working in multinational crew play essential role for the safety of each crewmember on board a vessel.

One of the fundamental factors, assisting the safety of navigation is the standardization of the language used for communication between vessels at sea, with shore stations in coastal waters, between the crewmembers in multinational crew. So, the standard phrases are intended for both external and internal communication. In other words, standard phrases should become a language security key for the verbal exchange of vitally important information.

Maritime English does not make use of all the means of the English language but only of those which are suited to meet the communicative requirements of a given maritime context, that is why Maritime English is regarded a restricted language as others ESPs (English for special purposes), too [5, p. 9].

The requirements to the professional training of specialists in the maritime industry are not limited to knowledge of theoretical material and its application in practice, but also include mastering the sublanguage of a specialty, which is based on special terminology and appropriate use of standard maritime language means.

The aim of the present article is to analyze the role of IMO Standard Marine Communica-

tion Phrases (SMCP) in safety of ship navigation, define their specific features and significance for the appropriate usage.

Under the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch keeping for Seafarers, 1978, as revised 1995, the ability to understand and use the SMCP is required for the certification of officers in charge of a navigational watch on ships of 500 gross tonnage or more [5, p. 7].

IMO's Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) were adopted by the 22nd Assembly in November 2001 as resolution A.918(22) IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases, replacing the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary (SMNV) adopted by IMO in 1977 (and amended in 1985). The resolution adopts the Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) and recommends a wide circulation to all prospective users and all maritime education authorities. The SMNV was developed for use by seafarers, following agreement that a common language – namely English – should be established for navigational purposes where language difficulties arise and the IMO SMCP has been developed as a more comprehensive standardized safety language, taking into account changing conditions in modern seafaring and covering all major safety-related verbal communication. The IMO SMCP builds on a basic knowledge of English and has been drafted in a simplified version of maritime English. It includes phrases for use in routine situations such as berthing as well as standard phrases and responses for use in emergency situations [4].

The SMCP is divided into Part A and Part B like its status within the framework of the STCW'95, namely, Part A is the mandatory section and Part B is the guidance section that has a meaning of supplementary to Part A. Part A is subdivided into External Communication and On-board Communication, while Part B contains only On-board Communication. As far as communication in urgent situation is concerned, important phrases are mainly contained in the items of Distress Communications (AI/1), Urgency Traffic (AI/2), Safety Communications (AI/3) in External Communication Phrases in Part A.

It is quite obvious that the aim of the establishment of the SMCP is not to standardize the words and phrases used at the time of emergency only, but to standardize the language used in communication for navigation at sea, in port-approaches, in waterways, harbors and on

board vessels with multilingual crews, in order to diminish misunderstanding in safety related verbal communications.

Eventually, the phrases contained in the SMCP are selected not only from distress communication but also from ordinary orders on board ships and are formal and tolerably simplified, that is to say, it seems that somewhat “textbook-like” phrases are selected as the standardized phrases.

The Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) has been compiled:

- to assist in the greater safety of navigation and of the conduct of the ship;
- to standardize the language used in communication for navigation at sea, in port-approaches;
  - in waterways, harbors and on board vessels with multilingual crews;
  - to assist maritime training institutions in meeting the objectives mentioned above.

The necessity to respond instantly to any impending threat in the shortest possible time results in need for the economy of linguistic means. The understanding of words is represented by the most elementary operation of decoding of the message. The real situation influences on conceptualization of words in dialogue. The simplified model of understanding of speech is observed only in case of perception of text in a foreign language. What also the Maritime English for non-speakers is.

Maritime messages should be short accurate and relevant and message markers are used to indicate the message type, to avoid confusions. So, after the ship's identity exchanges the operator can continue his transmission using message initiated by the message marker. Here're 7 types of message and reply markers, provided by SMCP:

Question	Answer
Instruction	Instruction-received
Advice	Advice-received
Request	Request-received
Information	Information-received
Warning	Warning-received
Intention	Intention-Received

Source: [2, p. 25]

This way the concept of the message marker helps to avoid ambiguities that can be of vital importance.

If there is a hazard to the ship safety, one of the words – concepts, which carry a certain message, should be used, they are: Mayday, Pan-Pan and Securite.



- MAYDAY – to be used to announce a distress message
- PAN – PAN – to be used to announce an urgency message
- SECURITÉ – to be used to announce a safety message [SMCP]

Every person on board is to be familiar with the message of each word-concept:

A Mayday call should be reserved for life threatening situations like fire on board, imminent loss of vessel control for any reason, pirate attack. It implies that there is imminent danger to life or to the continued viability of the vessel itself.

A Pan-Pan call is used to signify that there is an urgency on board there is no immediate danger to anyone's life or to the vessel itself: a vessel unsure of position, man-overboard recovery case.

A Securite call means that what follows is important safety information. The most common use of this is by coast radio stations before the broadcast of navigational warnings and meteorological information.

The listed above words-concepts are of great importance, so they are regularly used being short and distinctive – they are easily perceived by listening comprehension.

The SMCP include phrases which have been developed to cover the most important safety-related fields of verbal shore-to-ship (and vice versa), ship-to-ship and on-board communications. The aim is to reduce the problem of language barriers at sea and avoid misunderstandings which can cause accidents.

As navigational and safety communications must be precise, simple and unambiguous, so as to avoid confusion and error, there is a need to standardize the language used. This is of particular importance in the light of the increasing number of internationally trading vessels with crews speaking many different languages since problems of communication may cause misun-

derstandings leading to dangers to the vessel, the people on board and the environment.

Here are the examples of SMCP usage and their explanation (Table 1).

Standard Wheel Orders are of first-rate importance to know, as they are key navigational phrases. All wheel orders given should be repeated by the helmsman and the officer of the watch should ensure that they are carried out correctly and immediately. All wheel orders should be held until countermanded. Here are some examples of the wheel orders and the way they are interpreted:

SMCP	Explanation
Midships	Rudder must be held in the fore and aft position
Hard-a-port	Rudder fully over to port side
Starboard ten	Ten degrees of starboard rudder
Steady	Reduce the vessel's swing rapidly
Steady as she goes	Steer steady course on the compass heading

The wheel orders are shortened to minimum for the convenient usage, easy listening comprehension and understanding.

It must be mentioned that marine communication has specific rules which are followed in practice. According to the SMCP, communication at sea consists of the following stages:

1. Making contact,
2. Exchange of information,
3. End of procedure.

In the initial phase or making contact, the address or station which is called is to be called two or three times after which the station which is calling is to be identified. After this, VHF channel is to be agreed followed by a turn-giving signal "over" [3, p. 188].

Apart from the rules prescribed in the SMCP, real conversations between communicants differ, depending on the participants in communication

Table 1

SMCP	Explanation
M/v "Marina" is shifting berth	M/v "Marina" is on her way from one berth to another.
Embarkation not possible	Information. It is not possible for the Pilot to embark the vessel.
Tide rising	Tide is getting high.
4 shackles left	The are 4 shackles left to come in
Anchor is aweigh	Anchor is loose from the ground
I am not under command; I have problems with main engine	Vessel is unmanoeuvrable due to problems with main engine
Number of injured persons – 5. No casualties.	5 crew members have been wounded; nobody was killed.
Fire not under control. I require fire-fighting assistance	Fire cannot be extinguished by vessel's own equipment

and working context. When it is necessary to indicate that the SMCP are to be used, the following message may be sent:

“Please use Standard Marine Communication Phrases”.

“I will use Standard Marine Communication Phrases”.

The SMCP builds on a basic knowledge of the English language. It was drafted on purpose in a simplified version of Maritime English to reduce grammatical, lexical and idiomatic varieties to a tolerable minimum, using standardized structures for the sake of its function aspects. This means, in phrases offered for use in emergency and other situations developing under considerable pressure of time or psychological stress as well as in navigational warnings, a block language was applied which sparingly uses, or frequently omits, the function words the, a/an, is/are as done in seafaring practice. Users, however, may be flexible in this respect.

SMCP communicative features may be summarized as follows:

- avoiding synonyms;
- avoiding contracted forms;
- providing fully worded answers to “yes/no”-questions and basic alternative answers to sentence questions;
- providing one phrase for one event and structuring the corresponding phrases after the principle: identical invariable plus variable.

Use of the SMCP should be made as often as possible in preference to other wording of similar meaning; as minimum requirement users should adhere as closely as possible to their wording in relevant situations. In this way they are intended to become an acceptable safety language, using

English for the verbal interchange of intelligence among individuals of all maritime nations on the many and varied occasions when precise meanings and translations are in doubt, increasingly evident under modern conditions at sea [1, p. 169].

The conducted research leads to the conclusion that in order to ensure the safety of navigation and to exclude ambiguities and misunderstanding, it is important to reduce the lexical, grammatical, idiomatic multiplicity of English to a structured system. There’s no doubt that SMCP has made a big difference. Having an agreed set of phrases allows seafarers from many different nationalities to communicate with each other predictably in key areas of health and safety. One of the fundamental factors, assisting the effective communication at sea is the standardization of the language. That’s why the appropriate usage of IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases plays a key role in safety of navigation at sea.

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