

Maritime English Communication Training for Japanese VTS Operators in the Congested Area Including the Narrow Channel of Akashi Strait

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Abstract : This paper introduces a noteworthy form of English communication training for the officers and operators of the Osaka-Bay Marine Traffic Information Service (Osaka MARTIS) of the Japan Coast Guard working in the congested area at the Akashi Strait in Hyogo Prefecture, Japan. The authors of this paper, Marine Technical College's (MTC) English language instructors, have been holding about forty lectures and exercises in basic and normal Maritime English (ME) for several groups of MARTIS personnel at Osaka MARTIS annually since they started the training in 2005. Trainees are expected to be qualified Maritime Third-Class Radio Operators who are responsible for providing safety information to a daily average of seven to eight hundred vessels that pass through the Akashi Strait, one of Japan's narrowest channels. As of 2022, the instructors are conducting 55 remote lessons at MARTIS. One lesson is 90 minutes long. All 26 trainees are given oral and written assessments. The trainees need to pass the examination to become qualified operators every year, requiring them to train and maintain their linguistic levels even during the pandemic of Corona Virus Disease-19 (COVID-19). The vessel traffic information provided by Osaka MARTIS in Maritime English language is essential to the work involving the use of very high frequency (VHF) communication between MARTIS and vessels in the area. ME is the common language mainly used on board merchant, fishing, and recreational vessels, normally at sea. ME was edited and recommended by the International Maritime Organization in the 1970s, was revised in 2002, and has undergone continual revision. The vessel's circumstances are much more serious at the strait than those at the open sea, so these vessels need ME to receive guidance from the center when passing through the narrow strait. The imminent and challenging situations at the strait necessitate that textbooks' contents include the basics of the phrase book for seafarers as well as specific and additional navigational information, pronunciation exercises, notes on keywords and phrases, explanations about collocations, sample sentences, and explanations about the differences between synonyms especially those focusing on terminologies necessary for passing through the strait. Additionally, short Japanese-English translation quizzes about these topics, as well as prescribed readings about the maritime sector, are included in the textbook. All of these exercises have been trained in the remote education system since the outbreak of COVID-19. According to the guidelines of ME edited in 2009, the lowest level necessary for seafarers is B1 (lower individual users) of The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR). Therefore, this vocational ME language training at Osaka MARTIS aims for its trainees to communicate at levels higher than B1. A noteworthy proof of improvement from this training is that most of the trainees have become qualified marine radio communication officers.

Keywords : akashi strait, B1 of CEFR, maritime english communication training, osaka martis

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