

LEXICON AND SYNTACTIC PROFICIENCY LEVEL OF THE MARITIME STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the grammar competence of the maritime students. Specifically, it seeks to identify the Syntactic (grammar); and Lexicon (maritime terms and vocabulary) of the maritime students. Likewise this study deals with the English proficiency level of the maritime students based on grammatical knowledge through writing composition. This research uses a descriptive quantitative in nature since it determines simulation activities intended for maritime students which identify their vocabulary usage, maritime terms and grammar competency likewise with their English proficiency level through test of writing. The syntactic proficiency among maritime students is affected with correct grammar structures like subject verb-agreement, connection between a noun and pronoun in a sentence, identification of subject whether it is singular or plural based on the English grammar test used in this study.

Keywords: Lexicon, Maritime students, Proficiency level, Syntactic

INTRODUCTION

Many non-native English speakers onboard regard English language competence to be crucial in their work and social lives. Indeed, the International Maritime Organization (IMO, 2005) emphasizes the importance of knowing Maritime English because it provides a solid foundation for maritime students to become proficient in the language before boarding, one of which is their knowledge and competencies in grammar, vocabulary, and maritime terms.

According to the study of Benaldo (2019; 9), eighty percent of accidents at sea are caused by human mistake, according to the International Maritime Organization (IMO, 2005). Poor foundations in maritime English are one of the key culprits. According to Varsami, et al. (2019; 3), marine accidents are caused by human mistake and arise as a result of miscommunication between two people speaking to one other. Many seafarers, it was stated, had difficulty expressing themselves in English.

Grammar competency, vocabulary, and terminology acquisition is and has always been one of the fundamental tasks in foreign language learning for both general and professional objectives, according to Romanova (2013;18), notably for mariners because no communication is possible without words.

The researcher observes that maritime students are less proficient in the use of marine terminology and vocabulary; nonetheless, some students are highly proficient in grammar, which could be one of the causes for their writing deficiencies. As a result, they struggle to

compose easy writing pieces such as event reports and other relevant transmittal letters that are required for their course. The researcher believes that this study is necessary because grammar is important in learning how these marine students speak smoothly, particularly after they are onboard, and to meet the need in the maritime industry.

Designing an ESP model type approach for teaching Maritime English using game-based learning activities should be beneficial in improving students' vocabulary usage, grammar competencies, and English proficiency associated with many sectors of the maritime English course. Similarly, the researcher feels that the course contributes to the enhancement of students' English ability by recognizing their current language demands.

This research focuses on grammatical competence among maritime students. According to Canale and Swain (1980:3), linguistic competence, also known as grammatical competence, is an umbrella term that refers to the learners' use of lexis (vocabulary and mechanics) and syntax. According to Canale and Swain (1980:3), learners must be proficient in four primary areas in order to develop communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence.

The researcher analyzes how maritime students acquire grammatical competency in this study. As a result, this research shows that grammatical competence is important for maritime students' communicative development. Learners must know words and phrases in order to express meaning; that is, they must comprehend how words are split into various sounds and how sentences are stressed in specific ways. As a result, grammatical competency helps marine students to utilize and interpret English structures effectively and without hesitation, contributing to their fluency in maritime words and vocabulary.

The capacity to use a language correctly, as well as how effectively a person has acquired its features and rules, is referred to as grammatical competence or linguistic competence. Grammar competency shows how learners grasp English grammar and involves vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure. This is what teachers refer to as linguistic correctness. Grammatical competence, according to Canale and Swain (29-30), is concerned with mastery of the linguistic code (verbal or non-verbal), which involves knowledge of vocabulary as well as morphological, syntactic, semantic, phonological, and orthographic norms. The speaker's grammar competence allows him or her to apply the information and abilities required to comprehend and articulate the literal meaning of utterances. Lexical competence is also grouped in with other forms of 'linguistic – or what we call grammatical – forms (i.e. phonological forms, morphological forms, syntactic patterns, lexical items) without distinction, according to Canale and Swain (1980:2).

Canale and Swain (1980:29) define grammatical competence as "knowledge of lexical items, rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology that will be understood by learners when teachers include knowledge of lexical items, rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology." The communicative paradigm has come to dominate the way people think about L2 competence in general since the publication of Canale and Swain's work, and this has had a negative impact on the systematic study of lexical competence. The difficulties that were highlighted in that paper were extensively explored, while less important issues, such as lexical competence, were ignored. This is problematic because lexical competence is at the heart of communicative competence in any case.

Other authors, such as Chomsky (1965:260), share their thoughts on grammar competence. Grammatical competence, for him, corresponds to language competence and what Hymes means by "formally possible." Linguistic theory is concerned with describing the abstract abilities that enable speakers to construct grammatically accurate sentences in a language. The researcher in this study gives an activity that helps maritime students improve their writing skills. This is accomplished through a class exercise in which marine students are given the opportunity to write an example incident report or a simple essay on a given topic. A rubric will be used to grade the writing of the marine students. Grammar competence simply means "knowledge of the language system," or in other words, it is the grammatical knowledge that underpins the speaker-knowledge listener's and capacity to utilize the language. In terms of the usage of appropriate vocabulary and grammar structure, participation in communicative events is viewed as vital to language for the development of maritime pupils, requiring attention to produce exact and correct sentences structure. Structure, or grammar, a set of agreed assumptions about how marine language works, and the desire of these pupils to participate in the negotiation of meaning are all necessary for communicating onboard. Canale and Swain (1980:6) didn't say grammar isn't vital. Rather, they strive to place grammatical competence within a broader definition of communicative competence. Grammar is crucial, and maritime students should concentrate on it the most because it is the present necessity that they must possess in order to prepare for their time onboard. Explicit attention to form sentence-level lexis, and syntactical aspects, features of conversation, sociolinguistic rules of appropriateness, and communicative techniques themselves should be included because this is necessary.

METHODOLOGY

This research use descriptive quantitative methods to determine simulation activities for maritime students that assess their vocabulary, nautical words, and grammar proficiency, as well as their English proficiency level, using a writing test. The quantitative study question attempted to incorporate identifying vocabulary and words as well as writing composition in English classrooms utilizing the rubric.

This study is being carried out at the University of the Visayas, where the researcher currently works. The school is known for its dedication to providing quality services and education to ensure that these students have communication skills, and the school has grown in popularity and recognition, particularly in the field of communication, thanks to its competent and eloquent speakers, in which the school takes pride.

Marine English is continually evolving and developing in order to prepare future maritime students to be effective communicators. The study's respondents are 256 University of the Visayas marine students in the second semester of the academic year 2018-2019. With a 95 percent confidence level of 0.05 margin of error and a sample size of 256 total responses, the total population is 763 second and third-year maritime students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Grammar Competence

The proficiency of marine students in syntactic and lexical determines their grammar competence. Beginning, developing, nearing competence, proficient, and advanced are the different proficiency levels. In addition, the frequency, percentage, and mean are used, with the findings displayed in the tables below.

In terms of syntactic skill, table 1 indicates the grammar competence of marine students. The competence of the seafaring students in the ideas and norms of grammar, specifically in subject-verb agreement, is referred to as syntactic competency.

Table 1 Syntactic Proficiency among Maritime Students

Syntactic	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Grammar: Subject-Verb Agreement	64.77	11.81	Beginning

Note. n = 256. 74% and below – Beginning; 75-79% - Developing; 80-84% - Approaching Proficiency; 85-89% - Proficient; 90-100% - Advanced.

According to the results in table 1, 214 respondents received an average of 83.59 percent, indicating that their syntactic competence level is at the Beginning level. According to the English grammar test utilized in this study, accurate grammatical structures such as subject verb agreement, connection between a noun and a pronoun in a sentence, and identification of subject whether single or plural improve syntactic proficiency among marine students.

The findings show that the majority of students are still at the beginner level in terms of syntactic competency. This is why marine students must improve their ability to compose sentences utilizing the correct structure of the subject-verb agreement, connect nouns and pronouns in a sentence, and identify whether the subject is solitary or plural. The researcher and other maritime English professors have noticed that maritime students come from various educational backgrounds and have diverse study habits when it comes to English. While some students are well-versed in grammar, others require help to improve their English ability. Students rely on the sentences examples provided by the marine English lecturers in the classroom when given exercises or practice examinations for a specific subject in the parts of speech. They do not investigate and consider additional words and verbs that are useful in everyday life and communication. Students frequently imitate the examples provided by English teachers.

According to Richards (1994:26), the English language is employed to communicate meaning grammatically as a means of communication. According to him, learning a foreign language is a method of communicating utilizing that language as a target language, either in written or spoken form. The features of the target language help to support grammar competence. Language necessitates correct grammar because it is a fundamental component of communication and the development of an effective method of learning English. Because of this, written details are easier to notice and turn into more engaging elements in both written and oral forms of action.

The legitimate goal of language teaching is for students to be able to express themselves in meaningful ways and with spontaneity. As a result, students should acquire proper grammar and structure, as well as build communication skills in real-life circumstances (McDonough & Shaw, 2003; 46). Grammar structures, they claim, are a crucial tool for learning and academic performance.

Grammar education should not be abandoned, according to Savignon (1971;8). Instead, use it to replace structural drills in a language lab with meaning-focused self-expression. Grammar, he claims, is a more effective technique to enhance learners' communicative skills while preserving morphosyntactical and lexical accuracy. The results of the said activity's tests aid in the development of students' communicative and grammatical skills.

According to Canale (9), grammatical competence is also important in the development of mariners' English writing and communicative abilities. According to Canale and Swain, a lack of grammar expertise prohibits marine students from crafting grammatically and syntactically correct phrases. As a result, maritime students must improve their grammar skills in order to be properly equipped as independent language learners.

Harmer (1983; 114) further claims that any exercise or language drill used to motivate language learners is an internal drive that urges them to take action. When a student sees an appealing goal that he wants to reach, he will do whatever it takes to achieve it. Gardner (1972; 115) defines motivation as a combination of teacher and student effort, as well as a desire to attain the aim of language acquisition and favorable attitudes toward language learning. He also distinguishes between integrative and instrumental motivational orientations. The integrative occurs when a student is learning a language in order to develop a better understanding of the culture of that language, whereas the instrumental describes a set of motivational variables originating from external goals such as passing tests, receiving incentives, or advancing in a career. Gardner's motivation, on the other hand, is mostly linked to language accomplishment for both English teachers and seafaring students. Teachers believe that this distinction also operates in the process of marine learners learning grammar and vocabulary, based on interviews and observations with maritime students. That is to say, motivation is a key aspect for nautical students and other English learners who are learning grammar and improving their grammatical competency.

With the focus of foreign language grammar instruction shifting from teacher to student, one of the most pressing issues cannot be overlooked: learner motivation. We can only give a more realistic explanation of the disparity between different learners in the same learning environment by researching learners' motivation to learn grammar.

Marine English learning tools, such as grammatical structures and classroom English activities, allow maritime students to study, expose, and discover the English language through a communicative method. Grammar is an efficient technique to train students' communicative skill in English language teaching, according to Wang (4). As a result, marine English teachers should seek to improve current conditions by developing a new technique of teaching grammar in English to maritime students and exploring new trends in grammar teaching methods in order to fully improve students' English proficiency levels.

The following table shows the results of the competency level of marine students in terms of their maritime knowledge. The nautical terms contained in this study's English test were chosen from a maritime book and discussed in English class.

In terms of lexicon proficiency, table 2 indicates the grammatical competencies of marine students. Lexicon proficiency refers to pupils' knowledge of maritime words and language.

Table 2 Lexicon Proficiency among Maritime Students

Proficiency Level	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Maritime Terms	55.70	12.94	Beginning
Vocabulary	56.29	15.99	Beginning
Overall Lexicon Proficiency	56.00	12.22	Beginning

Note. n = 256. 74% and below – Beginning; 75-79% - Developing; 80-84% - Approaching Proficiency; 85-89% - Proficient; 90-100% - Advanced.

In terms of their maritime terminology proficiency level, 237 maritime students, or 55.70 percent of their mean score, can be considered as beginning competence level. It's worth noting that the majority of these students have limited or no familiarity of some maritime phrases.

The findings suggest that marine students have difficulty seeing the translations of the said maritime terminology and claim that they are unfamiliar with the terms or that they have forgotten them from earlier professional disciplines. The findings could also indicate that marine students may have issues with their study habits, time management (because some of these respondents are working students), and attitude toward learning the English language (as some of these students may take the topic for granted). They also have trouble deciphering the phrases and their meanings, while understanding what the teacher says. Some of these students are also influenced by professional sailors, who believe that professional or major courses are more important than Maritime English because they will not be utilizing English on-board all of the time.

The maritime students fail to recognize the importance of the English course to their field; instead, they focus on completing the maritime course and getting on board to earn money, believing that English will be taught to others once they are on board and that their basic English will be sufficient to work in the maritime industry.

According to Ahmed (2015;6), non-native English language speakers who work as crew members with a variety of backgrounds and cultural elements should be evaluated because it is critical that they communicate effectively with international speakers on international vessels, and those in charge should examine how the results of such training can be improved. To minimize complications, it is necessary to address language hurdles and differences in order to promote the best interests of these sailors who comprehend the language and are equipped with the vocabulary and words to use when they are on board.

As a result, students who are not native English speakers who work as Apprentice deck or Engine officers (Deck Cadets and Engine Cadets) on commercial boats find it impossible to learn anything from experienced officers who speak to them in English and use nautical words.

As a result, these students must be familiar with marine English words in order to communicate effectively, particularly in a maritime operating context.

As is generally known, the majority of marine accidents are caused by human mistake, and misunderstanding is a common occurrence. This could explain why the standard Maritime English, which should be familiar to all navigating officers and other ship crew members, as well as young apprentice officers, is not being used. For safe and efficient ship operations, effective communication is necessary. As a result, students must be properly prepared and equipped with various learning tools in order to compete globally.

Binawat (2017:8) emphasizes the necessity of communication through the use of acceptable English language as defined by the SMCP, which should not be taken for granted but should be emphasized to maritime students. It is important to analyze how students interact in the classroom in order to promote the best interests of maritime students.

The (vocabulary) lexicon proficiency level of maritime students suggests that 214 or 56.29 of the mean score among maritime students can be characterized as beginning proficiency level in terms of their lexicon proficiency level. The vocabulary words are related to ship terms that are regularly met not only in Maritime English classes, but also in their respective fields. The findings demonstrate that maritime students have a limited vocabulary (lexicon) connected to the course. This makes it impossible for them to write a logical and correct piece of work. When students are asked to extend their answers, their failure to construct cohesive concepts and have a solid foundation in understanding topics could be a contributory factor that they are unable to articulate in written and spoken forms due to their limited vocabulary.

The result gives information on the students' existing English proficiency from many perspectives, indicating that language competency among maritime students should be increased by the use of an ESP course designed for teachers who teach maritime students. ESP teachers should think about instructional methodologies, additional English activities where students can do practical application that could be useful on board, pedagogical instructional strategies, and the linguistic and conceptual problems that current maritime students are facing.

It is worth emphasizing that maritime students should have a strong foundation in key maritime words and vocabulary that they'll encounter onboard ships and in any sort of communication. Knowledge of English aids in communication and prevents maritime casualties from occurring again.

English Proficiency Level of Maritime Students

The grammatical competency level of maritime students is determined. The competence levels of marine students are scaled according to their ability to write. The results are presented in Table 3 using the mean and standard deviation.

Table 3. English Proficiency Level of Maritime Students in Terms of Their Grammatical Knowledge

Category	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Grammar (SVA)	1.84	0.84	FAIR
Spelling	2.15	0.79	FAIR
Punctuation	2.19	0.81	FAIR
Organization	1.84	0.89	FAIR
Overall Writing Proficiency Level	2.00	0.76	FAIR

Note. n = 256. 1.00-1.75 – Poor; 1.76-2.50 – Fair; 2.51-3.25 – Good; 3.26-4.00 – Excellent.

Gleaning from the table above, the grammatical proficiency level of the maritime students is fair. The proficiency level is categorized according to their knowledge in grammar wherein it has 1.84 average means which can be interpreted as fair. The interpretation implies that their composition entails limited word choice or grammar usage, inconsistencies in grammar usage like the verb tense and its usage.

In terms of spelling, it also gained an average of 2.15 which is fair. This means that they have limited knowledge in spelling, frequent errors in spelling which impede the readability of the words they used.

In terms of punctuation, the proficiency level of the maritime students gained 2.19 which means that the maritime students failed to emphasize the proper used of punctuation marks which impede understanding of their ideas. The organization of ideas based on their essay gained 1.84 which can be interpreted as fair. The interpretation implies that they have poor skills in stating the topic sentence or introductory paragraph, limited knowledge on giving supporting details and concluding statements.

Based on the table presented above, the over-all proficiency level in terms of their knowledge in grammar is 2.00 which can be interpreted as fair. This means that the maritime students have limited knowledge in the correct spelling of words that they used, the use of punctuation, and the organization of their paragraph writing. Thus they need to improve paragraph development as shown in the content of the rubric.

Some maritime students are into writing. They can express their ideas, feelings, and concepts when they are told to write a simple paragraph composition. However, most of these students have difficulty in expressing ideas into writing, they lack vocabulary words that describe what they mean, and sometimes they ask help from their teachers on what words to use when there is writing activity at the end of the lesson.

Grammatical competence reflects the knowledge of the linguistic code. Because it focuses directly on the knowledge and skill required to understand and express accurately the literal meaning of utterances according to Canale (p3). He added that grammatical competence plays a critical role in developing learners' English communicative competence like the maritime students. This idea has been supported by Gunasekera (p4), she said that it is noticeable that during teaching, most students are unable to speak effectively as they do not know the necessary English language or in other words, they lack vocabulary which means grammatically incompetent towards efficient communication.

Instructional materials provided to students should be relevant to the instruction that is going on in the rest of the unit or lesson. It should always reflect the most important aspects of what is being taught by teachers in the English subject and the content must be accurate and precise (Anderson (p.9). However, the module or manual to be used must be made flexible and sensitive to the needs of maritime students.

The study of Navarro, Zeanaida, and Garbin (2015) determines the English proficiency of Maritime students and assess the English instructional materials as a basis for enhancement on grammar and vocabulary skills of the maritime students. The instructional materials aim to emphasize the importance of instructional materials that ensures the development and enhancement skills of the maritime students in English subject. According to them poor communication is a result of failure to understand the vocabulary and terms. Therefore it is important that these maritime students need to be assisted and for them to be familiarized with the maritime words for ensuring a clearer and better understanding of the lesson in the maritime English subject.

Strict guidelines were issued by CHED particularly in the qualifications of faculty members, laboratory facilities, library holdings, physical plant and quality assurance systems which are always certified by accredited certifying bodies. However, knowing the competency level and the factors that affect language learning would help the language teaching authorities (i.e curriculum planners, syllabus makers, and the teachers) choose the materials, topics, and the situations that are within the range of students' learning experiences. In doing so, the students would be provided the opportunity to observe the rules of grammar, as well as, the rules in communication; thus, using the language in a more natural, meaningful and functional matter.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the researcher finds that the syntactic and lexical characteristics of marine students are beginning, although their grammatical understanding in terms of writing competency is fair. The researcher also discovered that maritime students are less proficient in punctuation, spelling, and arranging their thoughts in order to write a paragraph with proper grammar structures. Chomsky (1965; 260) claims that talking onboard is impossible without good grammar, vocabulary, and writing skills. Canale and Swain (1980;6) also show that grammar is crucial, and that maritime students should focus on grammar the most because it is the present necessity that they must possess in order to prepare for their time onboard. Because this is important, explicit attention to form sentence-level lexis, syntactical aspects, discourse features, sociolinguistic rules of appropriateness, and communicative techniques themselves should be included.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings imply that developing ESP courses for maritime students that include interactive game-based activities is critical in determining distinct performance objectives or activities and improving institutional guides that include nautical words and language.

Because their grammatical skills are in the beginning category, the results of the maritime students' grammatical competencies result in a diversity of language change by constructing an ESP model type strategy for improving the maritime students' English proficiency level.

The English teachers who teach maritime students should conduct a multi-faceted analysis while designing an ESP course that incorporates interactive games and its delivery to ensure that maritime lecturers have a background in maritime courses as well as the cultural backgrounds of maritime students so that they can adapt to current needs without losing their authenticity.

Administrators should provide teacher training to improve teachers' competence to use various ways in teaching maritime students.

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