

Interactive Technologies of Foreign Language Teaching in Future Marine Specialists' Training: from Experience of the Danube River Basin Universities

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Abstract: The article deals with the investigation of the interactive technologies of foreign language teaching in future marine specialists' training in the Danube river basin universities. The author gives definitions of the most popular interactive technologies aimed to form communicative competence as a significant component of future mariners' key competencies. Typology and analysis of some interactive technologies of foreign language teaching in future marine specialists' training are provided.

Keywords: interactive technology; communicative competence; Maritime English; professional foreign language communication.

Forming the boundary between great empires, playing a vital role in the settlement of central and southeastern Europe in the past, the Danube, this vital commercial highway, is nowadays of great economic importance to the countries that border it. These countries "shall strengthen, harmonise and coordinate measures taken/planned to be taken at the domestic and international level throughout the Danube Basin aiming at sustainable development and environmental protection of the Danube River" (Convention, 1994). We can name the establishment of different useful cultural and educational relationships between the Danube river basin countries as one of the uniting roles of the Danube.

Since the movement of freight transport is the most important economic use of the Danube (<http://www.britannica.com/place/Danube-River>), the Danube river basin universities training marine specialists are of great interest as seafarers ensure the sustainability of the global economy through their professionalism, skills and competence, commitment and care. It is well known that "effective institution-based training of seafarers complemented by on-board training and refresher programmes is at the core in maintaining and continuously developing seafarers' competence, quality and fitness for purpose" (Fuazudeen, 2014, p. 8). The shipping

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industry needs “to preserve the quality, practical skills and competence of qualified human resources <...>. While compliance with the 1978 STCW Convention and Code standards is essential for serving on board ships, the skills and competence of seafarers, and indeed, the human element ashore, can only be adequately underpinned, updated and maintained through effective maritime education and training” (http://www.onma.edu.ua/news/20150122n_uk.html). In 2015 World Maritime Day theme is “Maritime education and training” that provides a focus for year-round activities to highlight the importance not just within the shipping industry, of there being sufficient quantity and quality maritime education and training which is essential for the long-term sustainability of the sector, both at sea and on-shore.

We should stress on the matter that increase of the English language level of cadets and graduates of maritime educational institutions is one of four basic problems of maritime education in the decision of which maritime administration, educational institutions, shipping and crewing companies should be involved (Miyusov, 2014). Today knowledge of English is one of the key seafarers’ competences. Thus, minimum standard of competence for officers in charge of a navigational watch on ships of 500 gross tonnage or more includes “adequate knowledge of the English language to enable the officer <...> to communicate with other ships, coast stations and VTS centres and to perform the officer’s duties also with a multilingual crew” (STCW, 2011, p. 105). The importance of increasing the level of Maritime English communication is proved in practice by lots of facts and situations showing that seafarers who had the most language difficulties had lower perceptions of all aspects of life on board ranging from working hours to basic human rights (MARCOM Final Report, 2001, p. 143). There is a necessity to “actively encourage higher levels of English language competency through effective language education and training which closely reflects the practical communication skills required by the shipping industry” (Fuazudeen, 2014, p. 5). There is a need to try a creative approach to each and apply a variety of innovative ideas as well as use different training programs for foreign languages at the same time the usage of modern technologies cannot be overrated while teaching a foreign language (Solodilina, 2014).

We should point out that from the interactional theoretical view language is seen “as a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individuals” (Richards, Rodgers, 2001, p. 171). Moreover, one of two functions of the language is interactional and consists in establishing/maintaining social relationships. Interactional (“listener oriented”) spoken language is characterised by shifts of topic and short turns, the accuracy and clarity of information is not of primary importance, facts/views are not normally questioned or challenged, interlocutors are actively engaged in the negotiation of meaning (Brown & Yule, 1983b). Good communication isn’t created by efficiency or influence. It is created by connection, interaction, balance and

understanding. Interaction involves both social and personal input (emotions, creativity, agreement, disagreement, people waiting patiently to get a word in, sighing, nodding, gesticulating and so on) and forms the basis of the vast majority of everyday talking. Interaction is not waiting to be asked a question, is not giving a short, one-word answer to a question (Albayrak, Sag, 2011, p. 20). There should be a bias in favour of transactional talk reflected in the design of materials and activities for the classroom and the element of unpredictability which is inherent in interactional talk should be present in speaking and listening activities (McCarthy, 1991).

With the increasing sophistication of computer software, interactive man-machine communication is coming to play an ever more important part in the public, occupational, educational and even personal domains (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 82). We find it necessary to specify that nowadays interactive technologies are widely used in Maritime English teaching and for everyman the notion “interactive technology” is associated with modern information technologies (Internet) or ways of communication (a telephone, cable television, a computer). Only those, who are profoundly involved in Maritime English training, use such forms of interactive technologies as pair and group work during their classes (Model Course 3.17, 2015, p. 223).

Analysis of the scientific and Maritime English teaching resources has shown that there is great necessity in effective communication that can help enhance the quality of seafarers’ personal and professional lives. Instructors need to understand profoundly all aspects of the interactive technology within the communicative approach in order to be able to create tasks appropriate to their students’ learning needs, to develop the trainees’ communicative competence and to implement a syllabus that meets the requirements defined by the STCW Code.

The aim of our article is to investigate the interactive technologies of foreign language teaching in future marine specialists’ training in the Danube river basin universities. The objectives of the article are to give definitions of the most popular interactive technologies in Maritime English teaching, typology and analysis of some of them in foreign language teaching in future marine specialists’ training.

Before starting typology and analysis of interactive technologies, we would like to define the term “interactive technology”. This term consists of “inter-” which means “between (mutual), from one to another” (http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/inter_2) and “active”. The word “act” means “to do something for a particular purpose or in order to deal with a situation” (http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/act_2). The term “interactive” has the following meanings:

1. mutually or reciprocally active (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interactive>), acting one upon or with the other (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/interactive>), that involves people working together and having an influence on each other (<http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/interactive?q=interactive>), involving communication between people, e.g. interactive teaching methods (http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/interactive?utm_medium=widget_searchbox&utm_source=widget_searchbox_source&utm_campaign=widget_tracking), requiring people to talk with each other or do things together, e.g. interactive learning (<http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/interactive>);

2. of or relating to a two-way system of electronic communications, as by means of television or computer, (of a computer program, system) often in a conversational way interacting with a human user to obtain data, commands, to give immediate results or updated information (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/interactive>);

involving the actions, input of a user, especially of/relating to/being a two-way electronic communication system (a telephone, cable television, a computer), that involves a user's orders in information exchange, merchandise or responses in a poll (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interactive>);

that allows information to be passed continuously, in both directions between a computer and the person who uses it, e.g. interactive systems/video, an interactive whiteboard, fully interactive program (<http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/interactive?q=interactive>);

designed to respond to the actions, commands, etc. of a user, e.g. interactive software, an interactive Web site (<http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/interactive>);

an interactive system, computer program is designed to involve the user in the exchange of information, e.g. an interactive game, an interactive museum where children can actively manipulate the exhibits (http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/interactive?utm_medium=widget_searchbox&utm_source=widget_searchbox_source&utm_campaign=widget_tracking).

Taking into account one of our previous researches (Demchenko, 2014) we propose to define an interactive technology as an educational technology that includes active innovative teaching techniques inside and outside the classroom involving communication between people, not limited to software, hardware, Internet applications or activities, and used to facilitate learning.

The author considers necessary to remark that spoken interactions are regarded in the communicative approach as at least as important as reading and writing (Model Course 3.17, 2015, p. 204). In interactive spoken activities the language user acts alternately as speaker and listener with one or more interlocutors so as to construct conjointly, through the negotiation of meaning following the co-operative principle, conversational discourse. Reception and production strategies are employed constantly during interaction. There are also classes of cognitive and collaborative strategies (also called discourse strategies and co-operation strategies) concerned with managing co-operation and interaction such as turntaking and turngiving, framing the issue and establishing a line of approach, proposing and evaluating solutions, recapping and summarising the point reached, and mediating in a conflict. Examples of interactive activities include transactions, casual conversation, informal and formal discussions, debate, interview, negotiation, co-planning and practical goal-oriented co-operation (Council of Europe, 2001, p.73). Interaction through the medium of written language includes such activities as: passing and exchanging notes, memos, etc. when spoken interaction is impossible and inappropriate; correspondence by letter, fax, e-mail, etc.; negotiating the text of agreements, contracts, communiqués, etc. by reformulating and exchanging drafts, amendments, proof corrections, etc.; participating in on-line or off-line computer conferences. Face-to-face interaction may of course involve a mixture of media: spoken, written, audio-visual, paralinguistic and paratextual (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 82).

We would like to refer to the representation of foreign language teaching interactive technologies in scientific papers, Internet resources and on the official webpages and sites of some of the Danube river basin universities. With that it is necessary to take into consideration that language teaching content may be specified and organized by patterns of exchange and interaction or may be left unspecified, to be shaped by the inclinations of learners as interactors (Richards, Rodgers, 2001, p. 171). Thus, a survey at the Varna Naval Academy (Bulgaria) showed that very little attention had been given to student interaction. The students are reluctant to use their second language for spontaneous interaction in the classroom (i.e. in class discussions and pair/group work). Some causes of unsuccessful interaction are:

1. Native Speaker Expertise. Learners often feel intimidated by the idea that their performance will be measured against standards of 'perfection' (a common belief among learners of English as a foreign language that native speakers have full knowledge and command of their language and that their oral performance is impeccable), and the more ambitious the learner is the stronger this trend becomes (Tarone & Yule, 1989);
2. Correct Answer Syndrome. A belief is that there is one (and only one) 'correct' way of expressing a thought/idea, and that any deviation is an error, so it has to

be avoided. The learners are, consequently, very reluctant to experiment with the language, since they feel that the odds of 'getting it right' are against them. Very often the language teachers reinforce this syndrome by, intentionally or not, focusing constantly on accuracy of production;

3. Negative Training Practices:

- a. Very often most of native models for oral interaction presented to learners are either written texts read aloud (e.g. news bulletins), scripted dialogues and interviews delivered with unnatural accuracy and/or density of information. Learners seem to be somehow conditioned to respond to questions with an affirmative/negative statement. This practice reflects more the balance of power in the classroom rather than real-life spoken interaction where responding to a question with another question (e.g. How old are you? What kind of question is this?) is very common.
- b. Learners have been required to produce full responses at all times. This is particularly the case in grammar lessons in which there is an over-emphasis on the correct form, with no concern for the use of the structure in focus for communication.
- c. The evolutionary nature of the learners' interlanguage is not acknowledged. As a preventive or remedial course of action against 'erratic' performance the focus has been on accuracy with little or no tolerance of the learners' attempts to experiment with the new language.
- d. The status of redundancy in oral production is very low. That is, strategic use of pauses, fillers, repetition, restructuring is not encouraged or even acceptable. Learners remembered how they had been penalized if, when examined orally in class, they hesitated, groping for a word, or repeated words/phrases (a 'clear' indication for the examiner that they had not studied enough).
- e. Oral exam training and tasks have been limited to having learners reproduce hard-learned texts prepared in advance on a topic list (Marinova, 2007, pp. 155-156).

L. Marinova proposes such classification of classroom interactive activities which should form an integral part of the foreign language learning programme:

1. Awareness raising activities:

- a. Learners are recorded while they carry out an interaction activity (e.g. 'describe and arrange', 'describe and find similarities/differences', exchanging views/ideas, reaching a decision, solving a problem, etc.). The students then listen to the recording and are asked to evaluate their performance and discuss any difficulties they encountered and any strategies

they used in order to deal with them. If available facilities or the classroom size make recording problematic, one or two students in each group can play the role of the observer and take notes on the particular features focused on (i.e. use of circumlocution, word coinage, rephrasing/restructuring, fillers etc.). When the focus is on circumlocution or word coinage the teacher should see to it that what the learners have to communicate is not entirely within their linguistic competence.

- b. Learners listen to native speaker oral interaction and are asked to identify certain features/strategies through their linguistic (or even non-linguistic, e.g. 'um') realisations. The teacher then elicits the function and usefulness of these features/strategies. More expressions through which the feature/strategy focused upon is realised should be provided.

2. Practice activities:

- a. Substitution/Circumlocution: In an adaptation of 'charades', students (in opposing teams) have to describe a word/term or an expression. Successful attempts win a point for the team.
- b. Circumlocution/Rephrasing: Students are given strips of paper with a sentence on each. In every sentence a word or expression is underlined. In pairs, students have to communicate the 'message' without using the underlined word/expression. Feedback is immediate as their partners have to come up with the underlined word/expression. Only then can a strip be discarded. This is a team activity since the winner is the pair to discard all their strips first and by adding a time limit oral reaction under increased stress can be practised. The teacher should see to it that the words/expressions are well within the students' competence.
- c. Fillers: Learners are asked to think of and note down too personal/awkward questions to ask each other. When asked, learners have to try to delay the actual reply using fillers, replying with a question.
- d. Word formation: Learners in teams are given a set of dominoes on which there are words and/or affixes. The rules are the same as in the original game, with the only addition that the players have to explain the change that each word undergoes when combined with an affix. Alternatively, the dominoes can have nouns that can or cannot be compounded. Each pair of teams should be given a dictionary in case there are challenges (Marinova, 2007, p. 158).

Nowadays the general tendency is the constant increase in number of discussions concerning modern information technologies in Maritime English teaching, e.g. on the International Scientific and Technical Conference on "Sea and River Fleet: Operation and Repair" (March 24-25, 2015) Section 4 was "Modern information

technologies in education and foreign language training for marine engineers”. The scientific conference “Development of Maritime Education in the Black Sea Basin” (March 29 – April 1, 2015) concerned the development of the MARPLAT platform and e-learning education in the framework of the «MARINE» project (Maritime Network of Education for the Development of Maritime Culture in the Black Sea Basin). Such events unite representatives from concerned organizations, also from the Danube river basin marine educational establishments (most from Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine), who take an active part in scientific events dedicated to future marine specialists’ training.

E-learning platform with lots of useful links for students and foreign language professors is well elaborated by instructors of foreign language department at the faculty of maritime studies in university of Rijeka, Croatia (<http://www.pfri.uniri.hr/en/faculty-organisation/katedre/foreign-languages>). Prof. Dr. Boris Pritchard, Chairman of the IMEC Papers and Activities Committee, made a unique “attempt at identifying, describing and evaluating Maritime English learning/teaching materials as used currently” (Pritchard, 2004, p. 1). Among some of the more relevant criteria for making an evaluation checklist for maritime audiovisual materials he suggested interactive power (in contents, activities and exercises). Electronic PC-based materials, on CD-roms and multimedia, and CALL software, maritime English resources from the internet are of particular interest both for the modern Maritime English teacher and learner, because they allow a high degree of interactivity and self-learning (Pritchard, 2004, A databank..., pp.171-172).

Maritime English teaching interactive methods and computer based training-interactive soft of CERONAV Romanian maritime training center in Constanta are well known. Social interaction when the trainees learn from many sources is among its teaching methodology principles. During Computer-Based Training, Marine Software “S.M.C.P.” (Standard Maritime Communication Phrases) is used in accordance with IMO Model Course 3.17. It is well suited for self-study as well as for group training and it offers interactive possibilities such as language courses, routine scenarios and emergency scenarios, drills and evaluation tests (Albu, Martes, Manolache, 2005, p. 4).

An interactive computer laboratory allows the student to expand, deepen knowledge of vocabulary; to heighten awareness of accurate grammar usage, to practice aspects of language skills appropriate in the short-term for study, in the long-term for individual career goals; to practice aspects of skills useful in the outside world; to access developed materials which incorporate controlled, real English. In a truly interactive set-up the computer will not only respond to the student by indicating right/wrong but explain/respond to the nuances of English. The nature of language interaction when two people are communicating must be kept firmly in sight to maintain credibility and interest. In this respect the computer

(hardware and software) may often be regarded as the second party in a dialogue with the student (MARCOM Final Report, p.48-49).

O. Monastyrskaya from ONMA (Ukraine) pays special attention to CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) during the classroom's group multimedia authoring activity and its interactive nature because it can contain discussion, debates, role-plays, presentations; written reports, compositions stimulated by problem-solving tasks. Multimedia programmes combine the use of visual aids, authentic video materials, and original brief factual information presented in schemes, diagrams, pictures, slides. Teachers have the opportunity of training 3 language systems (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) and 4 communication skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) at the same time. In a student-centered approach to teaching, the teacher stimulates students to active participation in real life situations, encourages independent thinking by analyzing, finding own ways for combating with the problems, increases opportunities to interact in English, manages pair and group work, makes friendly and creative atmosphere during the lesson (Monastyrskaya, 2008, p. II-47).

Computer Based Training with the help of the Internet that advocates the learner-centered training (Web sites, E-mail correspondence, listservs, etc.) is investigated by G. Velikova (Bulgaria). For the professionals the role of the Internet in the learning mostly consists in offering free e-learning content and providing tools for open and distance learning due to the storage of references, resources, lessons and tools. There are two major kinds of activity types depending on the teacher's intentions – either to provide information resources for students or to engage them in research, understanding and assessment of content. At last, it's funny, interactive, contemporary, relevant, authentic (Velikova, 2007, pp. 172-173). Computer-based teacher-created materials (interactive exercises) are game-like, increase motivation when the material is directly linked to the course and students' interests. The students can work through the exercise taking as much time as they need and learning as they go, and receive immediate, frequent and non-judgmental feedback (<http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/methodology/teaching-technologies/teaching-technologies-creating-interactive-materials/146521> article). Apart from being posted on the Internet, interactive exercises (quizzes) may also be used on the school's network or even distributed to students on floppy discs. There may be many variations of interactive quizzes such as:

1. Short-answer quizzes (the students answer questions by typing their answers);
2. Crosswords (one can use definitions, translation or even pictures as clues);
3. Gap-filling exercises with or without a word list;
4. Matching exercises (one can use for putting lists in order and matching words, words and their definitions, words and pictures, questions and answers, halves of sentences, etc.);

5. Exercises with a timed component (a reading text can be set to disappear after a pre-specified amount of time, although students may click a button to see the text again);
6. Exercises with the added sound (listening exercises), pictures and video files;
7. Drag-and-drop exercises
(<http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/methodology/teaching-technologies/teaching-technologies-creating-interactive-materials/146521.article>).

K. Ancheva (Bulgaria) made a research of a “learn-by-doing” practice technique via Toastmasters (the activity, organized by a worldwide non-profit organization for helping people improve their public speaking and build up public speaking confidence) where students evaluate one another’s oral presentations. Only when they begin to “find faults” with others’ performances they develop a strong awareness of their own speaking skills. Students become better speakers, listeners and critical of their sentence structures, choice of words, body movements, eye contact, vocal quality, and many other elements in their speaking which have gone unnoticed so far. Toastmasters provides a communicative environment in class where students share substantive ideas, explore topics, and develop personal characteristics. A TOASTMASTERS meeting is split into two main sections – the first is the “speaking” section that includes prepared and impromptu speeches, the second is an “evaluation” section. The meeting is to be informative, fun and stress-free. It is a great experience for any student at any level but is more suitable and efficient to be practiced at the pre-intermediate, intermediate and advanced levels. It helps students develop greater confidence in speaking, creative thinking and critical ability. Students acquire leadership and group management abilities, and become more cooperative and efficient with group work in the English class (Ancheva, 2007).

Computer Mediated Communications and Distance Learning, and particularly asynchronous learning through the Internet, are becoming major vehicles for fulfilling the needs of Longlife Learning. A variety of learning technologies were developed and a number of new elements were incorporated into distance learning (video films, multimedia courseware, and live lessons delivered to remote classrooms). Today technological learning solutions are developing into effective applications. The Internet has become an essential communications platform and has new capabilities that can be utilized for distance learning (Čišić, Komadina, Kesić, 1999).

Taking into account the above enumerated, uniting definitions given in the dictionaries, we propose the following classification of interactive technologies of foreign language teaching in future marine specialists’ training in the Danube river basin universities:

1. Interactive classroom technologies. Here are the following patterns of classroom interaction:
 - a. The interaction between two or more people: teacher to student communication (greeting students, social conversation, checking the register and homework, giving instructions, explaining a language point, asking questions, assisting individuals with problems, concept checking, etc.), student to teacher interaction (greetings, asking for help and explanations, answering questions, presenting information, expressing ideas and opinions, discussing individual work, social conversation, etc.), student to student interaction (social conversation, working out and checking answers, checking understanding, asking for help, exchanging information, group work, pair work, peer correction, project work, reacting to someone's opinion, etc.) (Model Course 3.17, 2015, p. 211);
 - b. Miscellaneous interaction, e.g. the reader's interaction. "Topics for Discussion, Action, and Research" will encourage the readers to interact both with the text itself, with classmates, and with their own beliefs, convictions, and ideas. A set of topics invite readers to compare their responses with a partner, to observe a class, to share their ideas in a small group, to write out definitions of their own, and to think back – with certain criteria and characteristics in mind – on lessons that they themselves may have taught. As much reflection, discussion, and interaction as it can be one is to bring (within the confines of the printed word) into learning (Brown, 1994). Reading as an interactive process is the process of combining textual information with the information a reader brings to a text. The reading process is thus not simply a matter of extracting information from a text but it activates a range of knowledge in the reader's mind that he or she uses, and that may be refined and extended by the new information supplied by the text. Reading is here as a kind of dialogue between the reader and the text (Widdowson, 1979).
2. Interactive information technologies (computers, specialized networked systems, peripheral equipment, CD based training materials, etc.). They are most useful in presenting sound and visual materials with sufficient speed to maintain the interest and interactive quality of training applications (multimedia applications) and sufficient to permit very effective interactive type applications to be utilized without excessive waiting times for data transfer, software developments (MARCOM Final Report, 2001, pp. 35-37); etc.

The author would like to conclude by specifying that given definition of the interactive technology, typology and analysis of some interactive technologies in the Danube river basin universities present huge potential for their subsequent investigation and implementation in the process of foreign language teaching in

future marine specialists' training. As the maritime world constantly changes, there is a need for continuous update of Maritime English syllabus and materials.

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