MARCOM

The impact of multicultural and multilingual crews on maritime communication

**Funding:** European (4th RTD Framework Programme)

**Duration:** Jan 1997 - Dec 1998

**Status:** Complete with results

**Background & policy context:**

Over recent decades, maritime operations have become a globalised business, with merchant ships typically being manned by multinational and multilingual crews. This trend towards low cost flags has posed risks, in particular with respect to communication. Whether ship to shore or communication among vessels, a standardised use of maritime English is considered vital for safe ship operations and a reasonable working environment on board.

**Objectives:**

MARCOM aimed to improve communications, and thereby promote maritime safety, by dealing with the fundamentals in maritime socio-linguistic communications, ship-ship and ship-shore communication.

**Related Projects:**

- MASIS II: Human element in man/machine interface and interaction to improve safety and effectiveness transport for the European fleet.
- SAFECO: Safety of shipping in coastal waters.

**Parent Programmes:**

[FP4-TRANSPORT - Specific research, technological development and demonstration programme in the field of transport, 1994-1998](#)

**Institute type:** Public institution

**Institute name:** European Commission; Directorate-General for Energy and Transport (DG TREN; formerly DG VII)

**Funding type:** Public (EU)

**Partners:**

NA

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**Key Results:**
MARCOM has:

- studied language and misunderstanding from a socio-linguistic point of view;
- gathered examples of incidents and accidents related to communication problems in open seas or under pilotage, covering both ship to shore and on board communication;
- investigated the importance of language and cultural issues for the selection and recruitment of ship crews, based on a survey of ship operators’ views;
- analysed observations - attributed to misunderstanding, peculiar habits and cultural differences - of vessels under pilotage, made by researchers and pilots;
- analysed specific patterns of ship to ship and ship to shore communication;
- studied communication at the social level, meaning the actual communication difficulties among multicultural and multilingual crew;
- highlighted education and training requirements for basic and maritime English, based on feedback from questionnaires distributed to maritime colleges;
- analysed the background of English teachers in maritime institutions, the origin of current syllabi, and issues such as motivation to learn a language, course contents, available material for preparation of manuscripts and books, tools for teaching (e.g. computers, videos, internet access, etc.), and the assessment of the exit levels at the end of courses;
- made recommendations on how to integrate modern teaching tools, in particular the use of internet resources, into updated educational schemes;
- produced the outline of an up-to-date pilot syllabus for the teaching of maritime English, based on the latest rules and standards as communicated by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

Policy implications

The project's findings support the conclusion that one single syllabus for maritime English is unlikely to cover all the needs identified in the specific seafarers' context. The basis for improvements is seen in sharing and adopting best practice curricula and material, and in choosing a modular approach towards comprehensive syllabi for teaching maritime English.

Taking into account the rapidly changing maritime environment, reflecting commercial pressures, globalisation and constantly evolving standards and regulations, those future syllabi will have to allow for regular updates in an easily accessible way.

Documents:

- [marcom.pdf (Final report)](marcom.pdf)

STRIA Roadmaps: Network and traffic management systems

Transport mode: Water transport (sea & inland)

Transport policies: Decarbonisation, Societal/Economic issues