International Journal of Multilingual Education and Applied Linguistics
Volume. 1, No. 4, Tahun 2024
e-ISSN : 3046-8779; dan p-ISSN : 3046-8302; Hal. 93-100
DOI: https://doi.org/10.61132/ijmeal.v1i4.191
Available online at: https://international.aspirasi.or.id/index.php/IJMEAL

English of Marine Engineering: Characteristics of Phrases and Idioms

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Abstract. This study explores the unique characteristics of Marine Engineering English, a specialized form of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) used in ship machinery operations. Focusing on technical terminology, idiomatic expressions, and their functional roles, the research aims to identify how Marine Engineering English facilitates clear and efficient communication in marine engineering contexts. Data were collected from marine engineering textbooks, international journals, and authentic communication transcripts, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Marine Engineering English is characterized by its technical precision, standardized terminology, and use of idioms rooted in maritime traditions. Phrases like "main engine overhaul" and idioms such as "running like a well-oiled machine" are essential for operational safety and teamwork. Compared to General English, Marine Engineering English is highly specialized, with a focus on operational efficiency and cultural identity. The study concludes that integrating technical vocabulary and idiomatic expressions into maritime education can enhance learners' communicative competence. Practical recommendations are provided for learners, educators, and industry professionals to improve the teaching and application of Marine Engineering English.

Keywords: Marine Engineering English, technical terminology, idiomatic expressions, English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

1. INTRODUCTION

Marine Engineering English is a specialized form of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that plays a critical role in the field of ship machinery and technical operations. Unlike General English, which is used for everyday communication, Marine Engineering English is tailored to the unique demands of maritime environments, particularly in the operation, maintenance, and repair of ship machinery such as engines, propulsion systems, and auxiliary equipment. This specialized language is essential for ensuring clear, precise, and efficient communication, which is vital for operational safety and efficiency in the high-stakes environment of a ship's engine room.

The maritime industry relies heavily on accurate communication to prevent technical failures and ensure the safety of crew members and vessels. For example, phrases like "main engine failure," "cooling system malfunction," or "fuel injection issue" must be communicated clearly and promptly to avoid accidents and ensure timely repairs. Marine Engineering English, therefore, serves as a vital tool for engineers, technicians, and crew members working in the complex and high-pressure environment of a ship's engine room.

In addition to its technical precision, Marine Engineering English is also characterized by its use of idiomatic expressions and metaphors that reflect the cultural and historical roots of seafaring traditions. Idioms like "running like a well-oiled machine" and "tightening the bolts" are commonly used to describe efficient operations and teamwork, while metaphors such

Received: September 30, 2024; Revised: Oktober 30, 2024; Accepted: November 27, 2024;
Published: November 30, 2024;

as "the heart of the ship" (referring to the engine) help explain complex technical concepts in relatable terms. These linguistic features not only enhance communication but also foster a sense of identity and solidarity among maritime professionals.

This study aims to explore the unique characteristics of Marine Engineering English, with a focus on its application in ship machinery operations. Specifically, the research seeks to identify the technical vocabulary and phrases commonly used in Marine Engineering English, analyze the role of idiomatic expressions and metaphors in facilitating communication, and examine the challenges and opportunities associated with teaching and learning this specialized language. By doing so, this study contributes to the broader understanding of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and highlights the importance of linguistic precision and cultural awareness in marine engineering.

This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by highlighting the unique linguistic needs of marine engineers. The findings of this study can inform the development of specialized language training programs, teaching materials, and communication protocols tailored to the marine engineering profession. By enhancing the communicative competence of marine engineers, this research ultimately supports the safety, efficiency, and sustainability of global maritime operations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Marine Engineering

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a branch of applied linguistics that focuses on the linguistic needs of learners in specific professional or academic contexts. In the field of marine engineering, ESP is tailored to meet the unique communication demands of ship machinery operations, including the use of technical terminology, standardized phrases, and idiomatic expressions (Hutchinson & Waters, 2018). Marine Engineering English, as a subset of ESP, is characterized by its emphasis on precision, clarity, and efficiency, which are essential for ensuring operational safety and effectiveness.

The development of Marine Engineering English is driven by the recognition that language use varies significantly across different engineering disciplines. For example, Dudley-Evans and St. John (2018) emphasize that ESP is characterized by its focus on specific vocabulary, grammatical structures, and discourse patterns that are relevant to a particular field. In the context of marine engineering, this includes terms such as "crankshaft alignment," "cooling system maintenance," and "propulsion control," which are critical for clear and accurate communication in ship machinery operations.

Technical Terminology in Marine Engineering English

Technical terminology is a defining feature of Marine Engineering English, reflecting the specialized knowledge and skills required for ship machinery operations. According to Pritchard (2019), marine engineering terminology is highly specialized, with terms such as "bilge pumping system," "turbocharger," and "fuel injection troubleshooting" having precise meanings that are critical for effective communication. These terms are often derived from mechanical and electrical engineering but are adapted to the specific needs of maritime environments.

The use of standardized terminology is particularly important in high-stakes scenarios, such as engine maintenance or emergency repairs, where misunderstandings can lead to catastrophic consequences. For example, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has developed the Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) to provide a standardized framework for maritime communication, including technical instructions and safety protocols (IMO, 2017). This standardization ensures that technical terms are understood consistently across different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, reducing the risk of miscommunication.

Idiomatic Expressions and Metaphors in Marine Engineering English

In addition to technical terminology, Marine Engineering English also includes a variety of idiomatic expressions and metaphors that are unique to the field. These expressions often have historical roots and reflect the shared experiences and traditions of marine engineers. For example, the idiom "running like a well-oiled machine" is commonly used to describe efficient and smooth operations, while "tightening the bolts" metaphorically refers to improving teamwork and coordination (Nikulina, 2021).

Metaphors are particularly prevalent in Marine Engineering English, bridging the gap between technical concepts and everyday language. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2017), metaphors are not merely decorative elements of language but are fundamental to how we conceptualize and communicate ideas. In marine engineering, metaphors such as "the heart of the ship" (referring to the engine) and "the nervous system" (referring to the electrical system) are used to explain complex technical processes in relatable terms. These metaphors not only facilitate understanding but also reinforce the cultural significance of maritime language.

Challenges in Teaching and Learning Marine Engineering English

Teaching and learning Marine Engineering English present several challenges, particularly in multilingual and multicultural contexts. One of the main challenges is the need to balance technical precision with cultural relevance. While technical terminology is essential

for accurate communication, idiomatic expressions and cultural references can be difficult for non-native speakers to understand and use appropriately (Oxford University Press ELT, 2014).

Another challenge is the lack of authentic teaching materials that reflect the real-world communication needs of marine engineers. Many existing textbooks and resources focus on general maritime language rather than the specific linguistic demands of ship machinery operations. This gap highlights the need for more specialized teaching materials that incorporate authentic communication transcripts, case studies, and practical exercises (Brown, 2021).

The Role of Technology in Marine Engineering English

Technology plays an increasingly important role in supporting the teaching and learning of Marine Engineering English. Digital tools, such as augmented reality (AR) manuals, AI-driven language assistants, and online learning platforms, can provide marine engineers with real-time support for technical communication and troubleshooting (Nautic, n.d.). For example, AR manuals can overlay technical instructions onto physical equipment, helping engineers understand and follow complex procedures more effectively. Similarly, AI-driven language assistants can provide instant translations and explanations of technical terms, reducing language barriers in multilingual crews.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design with a focus on textual analysis to explore the linguistic characteristics of Marine Engineering English. Data were collected from three primary sources: marine engineering textbooks, international journals on maritime studies, and authentic communication transcripts, such as engine room logs and maintenance reports. The data collection process involved document analysis, transcript analysis, and keyword searches to identify technical terms, idiomatic expressions, and metaphorical language used in ship machinery operations. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, following a systematic process of familiarization, coding, theme development, and interpretation. This method allowed for the identification of key patterns and themes related to the research objectives. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, anonymity, and transparency, were strictly adhered to throughout the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Marine Engineering English

The analysis revealed that Marine Engineering English is characterized by its technical precision, standardized terminology, and use of idiomatic expressions. These linguistic features are essential for ensuring clear and efficient communication in ship machinery operations, where accuracy and speed are critical. Below is a summary of the key findings, presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Examples of Marine Engineering Phrases and Idioms

Category	Example	Meaning/Function
Technical Phrases	"Main engine overhaul"	Refers to the complete inspection and repair of the ship's main engine.
	"Bilge pumping system"	Describes the system used to remove water from the ship's bilge.
	"Fuel injection troubleshooting"	Refers to diagnosing and fixing issues with the fuel injection system
Idiomatic Expressions	"Running like a well-oiled machine"	Describes a system or team operating smoothly and efficiently.
	"Tightening the bolts"	Metaphorically refers to improving teamwork or addressing minor issues.
	"Back to the drawing board"	Indicates the need to restart a project or process from the beginning.

Comparison with General English

While Marine Engineering English shares some similarities with General English, such as basic grammar and sentence structure, it is distinguished by its specialized vocabulary, context-specific idioms, and functional focus. Below is a comparison of the characteristics of Marine Engineering English and General English:

Table 2: Comparison of Marine Engineering English and General English

Aspect	Marine Engineering English	General English
Vocabulary	Highly specialized (e.g., "crankshaft alignment," "turbocharger").	Broad and general (e.g., "car," "computer").
Idioms	Context-specific and rooted in maritime traditions (e.g., "batten down the hatches").	Common and widely applicable (e.g., "break the ice").

Function	Focused on operational safety, efficiency, and precision.	Used for everyday communication and expression.
Standardization	Follows strict protocols (e.g., IMO's SMCP).	No strict standardization, more flexible.

For example, the phrase "main engine overhaul" in Marine Engineering English has a very specific meaning related to ship machinery, whereas in General English, the word "overhaul" might be used more broadly, such as in the phrase "overhaul the schedule" (meaning to revise or reorganize). Similarly, the idiom "running like a well-oiled machine" is commonly used in Marine Engineering English to describe efficient operations, while in General English, it might be used metaphorically in various contexts, such as describing a well-organized event or team.

Technical Phrases in Marine Engineering English

Technical phrases are the backbone of Marine Engineering English, providing precise and unambiguous descriptions of ship machinery operations. For example, the phrase "main engine overhaul" is used to describe the comprehensive inspection, repair, and maintenance of a ship's main engine. This phrase is critical in ensuring that all crew members understand the scope and requirements of the task, reducing the risk of miscommunication.

Another example is the phrase “bilge pumping system," which refers to the system used to remove water that accumulates in the bilge (the lowest part of the ship's hull). This phrase is essential for maintaining the ship's stability and preventing flooding. Similarly, "fuel injection troubleshooting" is used to describe the process of diagnosing and resolving issues with the fuel injection system, which is crucial for the engine's performance.

These technical phrases highlight the importance of standardized terminology in Marine Engineering English. As noted in the literature review, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has developed the Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) to ensure consistency and clarity in maritime communication (IMO, 2017). The use of standardized phrases like those in Table 1 helps prevent misunderstandings and enhances operational safety.

Idiomatic Expressions in Marine Engineering English

Idiomatic expressions play a significant role in Marine Engineering English, serving both functional and cultural purposes. For example, the idiom "running like a well-oiled machine" is commonly used to describe a system or team that is operating smoothly and efficiently. This idiom reflects the importance of maintenance and teamwork in marine engineering, where even minor issues can have significant consequences.

Another example is the idiom "tightening the bolts," which metaphorically refers to improving teamwork or addressing minor issues before they escalate. This idiom emphasizes the proactive approach required in marine engineering, where preventive maintenance is key to avoiding major breakdowns. Similarly, the phrase "back to the drawing board" is used to indicate the need to restart a project or process from the beginning, often after a failure or unexpected challenge.

These idiomatic expressions highlight the cultural and historical roots of Marine Engineering English. As Nikulina (2021) notes, many maritime idioms originate from the experiences and challenges of life at sea, reflecting the shared heritage of seafaring communities. These idioms not only enrich the language but also foster a sense of identity and solidarity among marine engineers.

Functional Role of Marine Engineering English

The findings of this study demonstrate that Marine Engineering English plays a critical role in facilitating clear and efficient communication in ship machinery operations. Technical phrases like "main engine overhaul" and "bilge pumping system" ensure that instructions are understood quickly and accurately, while idiomatic expressions like "running like a well-oiled machine" and "tightening the bolts" enhance teamwork and problem-solving.

The use of standardized terminology and idiomatic expressions also contributes to operational safety. For example, during a simulated engine room drill analyzed in this study, the phrase "emergency shutdown procedure" was immediately recognized and acted upon by the crew, demonstrating the effectiveness of standardized language in high-pressure situations. Similarly, the idiom "all hands on deck" was used to mobilize the team quickly during an emergency, highlighting the importance of clear and concise communication.

Implications for Teaching and Learning Marine Engineering English

The findings of this study have significant implications for the teaching and learning of Marine Engineering English. Technical phrases and idiomatic expressions should be integrated into marine engineering curricula to prepare students for the linguistic demands of their profession. Practical exercises, such as simulating engine room scenarios or analyzing maintenance reports, can help students apply this language in real-world contexts.

Additionally, educators should emphasize the cultural and historical origins of maritime idioms to enhance students' appreciation of the language and its significance in the maritime profession. By understanding both the technical and cultural aspects of Marine Engineering English, learners can develop the communicative competence needed to navigate the complexities of ship machinery operations.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the unique characteristics of Marine Engineering English, emphasizing its technical precision, standardized terminology, and use of idiomatic expressions rooted in maritime traditions. Compared to General English, Maritime Engineering English is highly specialized, with a focus on operational safety, efficiency, and cultural identity. Phrases like "main engine overhaul" and idioms such as "running like a well-oiled machine" are essential for clear communication and teamwork in ship machinery operations.

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