



DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL LISTENING COMPETENCE IN MARITIME ENGLISH: A TASK EVALUATION STUDY

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Abstract:

Listening comprehension constitutes a core component of communicative competence in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly within Maritime English instruction where oral interaction is central to professional practice. This paper evaluates a listening task implemented in a B2-level Maritime English classroom consisting of Greek-speaking trainee deck cadets. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from listening pedagogy and classroom interaction research (Rost, 2011; Richards, 1983; Vandergrift, 2004; Sifakis & Georgountzou, 2018), the study critically examines the task's authenticity, level of difficulty, discourse features, pedagogical orientation, and alignment with learners' professional needs. Findings suggest that while the task demonstrates contextual relevance and incorporates features of authentic spoken discourse, improvements on differentiation, audio clarity and productive skills integration would enhance its pedagogical effectiveness. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for ESP listening task design in maritime contexts.

Keywords: listening comprehension, Maritime English, ESP, task evaluation, authenticity, listening pedagogy

1. Introduction

Listening is widely recognised as a core skill in second language acquisition and professional communication. In English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, particularly Maritime English, listening competence is not merely academic but occupationally essential. Maritime professionals must process spoken instructions, safety briefings, and operational communication in multilingual environments.

The present paper evaluates a listening activity used in a Maritime English course delivered to trainee deck cadets at a Greek Maritime Academy. The analysis investigates the extent to which the task aligns with theoretical principles of listening pedagogy and

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meets the communicative demands of learners preparing for professional maritime contexts. The paper addresses the following guiding question:

- To what extent does the selected listening task effectively develop listening competence relevant to maritime professional communication at B2 level?

2. Context and Learner Profile

The listening task was implemented in a class of twelve Greek-speaking learners aged 19–21 enrolled at the Maritime Academy of Crete. All learners were monolingual Greek speakers (L1: Greek) preparing for careers as deck cadets on various types of vessels. Their target proficiency corresponds to B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). Although all students had previous exposure to English instructions, proficiency levels varied. Approximately half demonstrated adequate communicative competence, while the remaining learners struggled, largely due to limited exposure to English in authentic professional settings. All learners expressed strong motivation to acquire technical vocabulary and communicative competence relevant to maritime employment. The coursebook used was *Maritime English, Volume I* (Papaleonida, 2018), designed specifically for maritime academies.

3. Theoretical Framework

Listening comprehension involves both bottom-up and top-down processing mechanisms. Richards (1983) identifies several micro-skills necessary for effective listening, including processing speech at varying speeds and recognizing grammatical and lexical cues. Rost (2011) further emphasises the importance of exposure to authentic spoken discourse features such as hesitations, pauses, intonation shifts and speech rate variability.

Vandergrift (2004) highlights the cognitive demands of listening, particularly the role of short-term memory and paying attention to details. Task difficulty, therefore, depends not only on linguistic complexity but also on learners' processing capacity and contextual familiarity.

Within ESP contexts, authenticity and relevance are critical. Sifakis and Georgountzou (2018) argue that meaningful task design should reflect real-world communicative demands while facilitating input-to-intake transformation. Additionally, interaction plays a central role in learning, as learners co-construct understanding through classroom discourse (Allwright, 1984).

4. Description of the Listening Task

The listening task consisted of a semi-scripted dialogue between a Chief Officer and a newly appointed Ordinary Seaman (O/S). The interaction simulated a workplace

introduction onboard a vessel, covering personal details (e.g., date of birth, seaman's book number) and previous employment experience. Learners completed a multiple-choice comprehension exercise while listening to the recording. The dialogue was delivered with natural speech characteristics and included accent variation (American English), providing exposure to international maritime communication norms.

5. Evaluation of the Listening Input

5.1 Authenticity and Discourse Features

Although pedagogically constructed, the dialogue incorporated features that were characteristic of natural speech, including varied intonation, pauses, hesitations, and speech rate fluctuation. These features align with Rost's (2011) criteria for authenticity in spoken discourse. The transactional nature of the dialogue closely mirrors real onboarding exchanges in maritime settings, thereby enhancing situational authenticity and professional relevance.

5.2 Level of Difficulty

Linguistically, the content was not complex; it focused primarily on familiar personal and professional information. However, task difficulty was mediated by learner proficiency and processing capacity. The difference in speech rate between interlocutors required learners to adjust listening strategies, reflecting Richards' (1983) emphasis on processing variability.

For less proficient learners, rapid delivery posed comprehension challenges, highlighting the cognitive load described by Vandergrift (2004).

5.3 Accent and Exposure

The presence of an American accent introduced valuable exposure to international English varieties. While initially challenging for some learners, such exposure supports the development of global communicative competence necessary for maritime professionals who come in contact with diverse nationalities.

6. Evaluation of Pedagogical Staging

6.1 Pre-Listening Activities

Two preliminary listening activities preceded the main task. These shorter recordings, delivered at a slower pace, functioned as scaffolding tools by activating schemata and familiarizing learners with relevant vocabulary. A subsequent speaking task required learners to introduce previously mentioned seafarers, facilitating transformation of input into intake (Sifakis & Georgountzou, 2018).

6.2 While-Listening Stage

The main task primarily engaged bottom-up processing, requiring identification of specific details. Additionally, pragmatic knowledge was activated, particularly familiarity with the Maritime Alphabet. The activity was instructional rather than evaluative, as listening is not formally examined in the final assessment. To support comprehension, the recording was played twice and additional waiting time was provided. Peer feedback and whole-class discussion also followed.

6.3 Post-Listening Stage

The post-listening activity involved completing a Cadet form using personal information. However, productive skills integration was limited, as learners were required to select rather than generate their own responses.

7. Pedagogical Implications

Several improvements are proposed:

- 1) **Differentiation:** Additional higher-order comprehension questions could challenge more advanced learners.
- 2) **Audio Quality:** Removal of background noise would reduce extraneous cognitive load.
- 3) **Enhanced Pre-Listening Support:** Inclusion of a written cadet profile could provide visual contextual support.
- 4) **Productive Integration:** A post-listening writing or role-play task could enhance communicative competence.
- 5) **Collaborative Interaction:** Pairing higher- and lower-proficiency learners may foster peer-supported learning, consistent with Allwright's (1984) emphasis on interaction.

8. Conclusion

The evaluated listening task successfully aligns with the communicative demands of Maritime English instruction at B2 level. Its situational authenticity and professional relevance constitute significant strengths. Nevertheless, further integration of productive skills, differentiation strategies and improved audio quality would enhance its pedagogical impact. Effective listening instruction in ESP contexts requires careful planning, contextual relevance, and opportunities for meaningful interaction (Sheerin, 1987). This evaluation underscores the importance of principled task design in preparing learners for authentic professional communication.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

Afroditi Doulkeridou is an experienced English language teacher specializing in communicative and technology-enhanced approaches to education. She has taught English, Mathematics, and ICT to adult learners in the United Kingdom, focusing on Functional Skills and digital literacy. Since 2020, she has taught English at Maritime Academies of Syros and Crete and, since 2021, across vocational fields in public colleges, apprenticeships and adult education sectors in Chania, Greece. She holds a Master's degree in the Teaching of English as a Foreign/International Language from the Hellenic Open University. Her practice integrates interactive tools and learner-centered methods to foster engagement, inclusion, and cultural awareness in diverse learning contexts.

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Appendix A: Summary of Listening Materials Analysed

The listening materials analysed in this study were drawn from Papaleonida (2018). In accordance with copyright regulations, the original exercises and full scripts are not reproduced here. Instead, a structured summary of the materials is provided.

A1. Pre-Listening Activities

Learners completed structured personal information forms while listening to two seafarers introducing themselves. Information included age, nationality, rank, vessel, and marital status. The aim was to activate schemata related to maritime professional identity.

A2. Crew Manager–Captain Dialogue

Learners listened to a telephone exchange concerning crew members joining a vessel at the next port of call. Students identified names, ranks, nationalities, and ages. The activity incorporated use of the Maritime Alphabet for spelling.

A3. Main Welcome Dialogue

The central listening task involved a workplace onboarding dialogue between a Chief Mate and a newly arrived Ordinary Seaman. Learners answered multiple-choice questions regarding personal data, previous vessel type, and reporting hierarchy on board.

A4. Post-Listening Consolidation

Learners completed a cadet application form requiring personal and professional details, consolidating lexical and structural patterns introduced in the listening phase.

Source: Papaleonida, P. L. (2018). *Maritime English, Volume I*. Athens: Evgenidio Foundation.