

English as Working Language during Manoeuvring

By Matthias Meyer
Master Mariner

Let me first introduce myself:

My Name is Matthias Meyer

Born 1961, I started my career, as an OS on a gastanker in 1976, at the age of 15.

Taking all steps on the ladder I became AB, and after visiting the late High school and the “Hochschule Bremen (“University of Applied Science”) I was employed as 3rd mate in a German company.

From late 1993 I was employed in a small Cyprus Shipping Company named ISLAMAR as officer and master.

1997 I became superintendent in Lemessos in Cyprus.

1999 I left Cyprus to work for a German Company in Bremen as master until 2001.

2001 I was employed as technical superintendent in a company in Hamburg for a short time until 2002

2002 I was elected as Harbourpilot in Bremerhaven where I was in service until my early retirement this year in march.

End of last year we started (a harbourpilot colleague and I) a consultant company in Bremerhaven.

One part of our business is, to provide practical English language courses to tugboat crews.

Don't worry. I'm not teaching!

Our teachers are native speakers, and they have degrees in psychology and economy.

But most important: All of them have a practical background in the shipping business.

Back to the Situation

1 The Master

Almost all over the world the working language in a port is the national language. So far this seems ok until there is no third party involved, which is not able to understand the national language of the local port.

A foreign master of a vessel calling a German port will understand easily more or less everything on approach to the pilot station. German Bight Traffic is providing all necessary information in English. On request of the vessel the traffic situation report will be broadcasted in English language as well.

The officers on board of the pilot vessel are speaking English to guide the vessel to pilot boarding ground. They give all necessary advises in English. **In such a situation the master, depending on his experience, feels safe and good accompanied.**

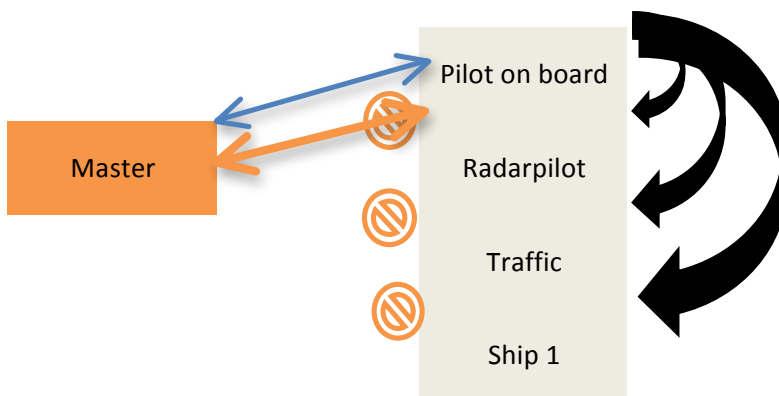
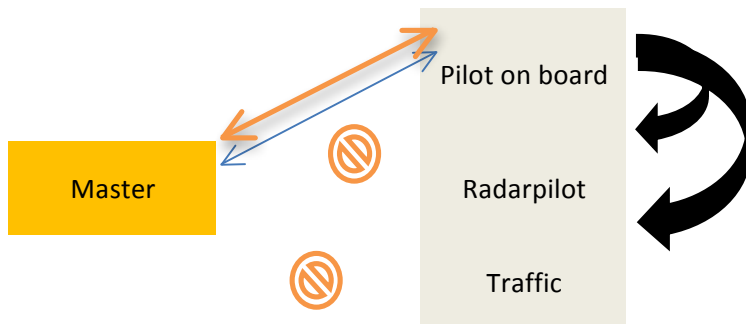
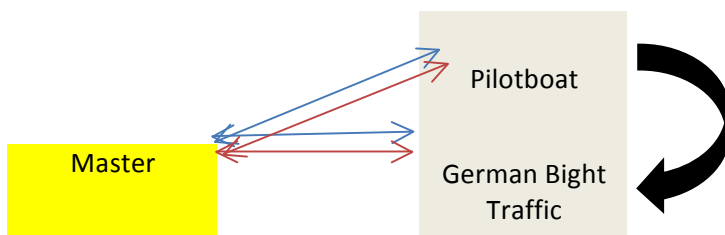
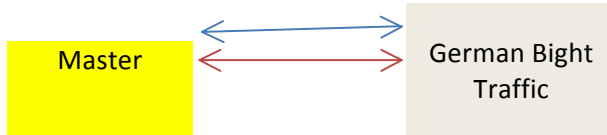
When the sea pilot is on board and the vessel is approaching to its destination, the bridge team is operating according to the requirements. According to the requirements the working language, which can be assumed is on almost every vessel the English language. During the master-pilot information exchange, the master will inform the pilot regarding the manoeuvrability, the characteristics of the vessel, and other facts of importance for the pilot. The pilot will inform the master regarding his passage planning and, if so, any berthing instructions or other news the master might not be aware of. The pilot will pilot the vessel under the command of the master or the responsible officer, if master is for a moment not be on the bridge.

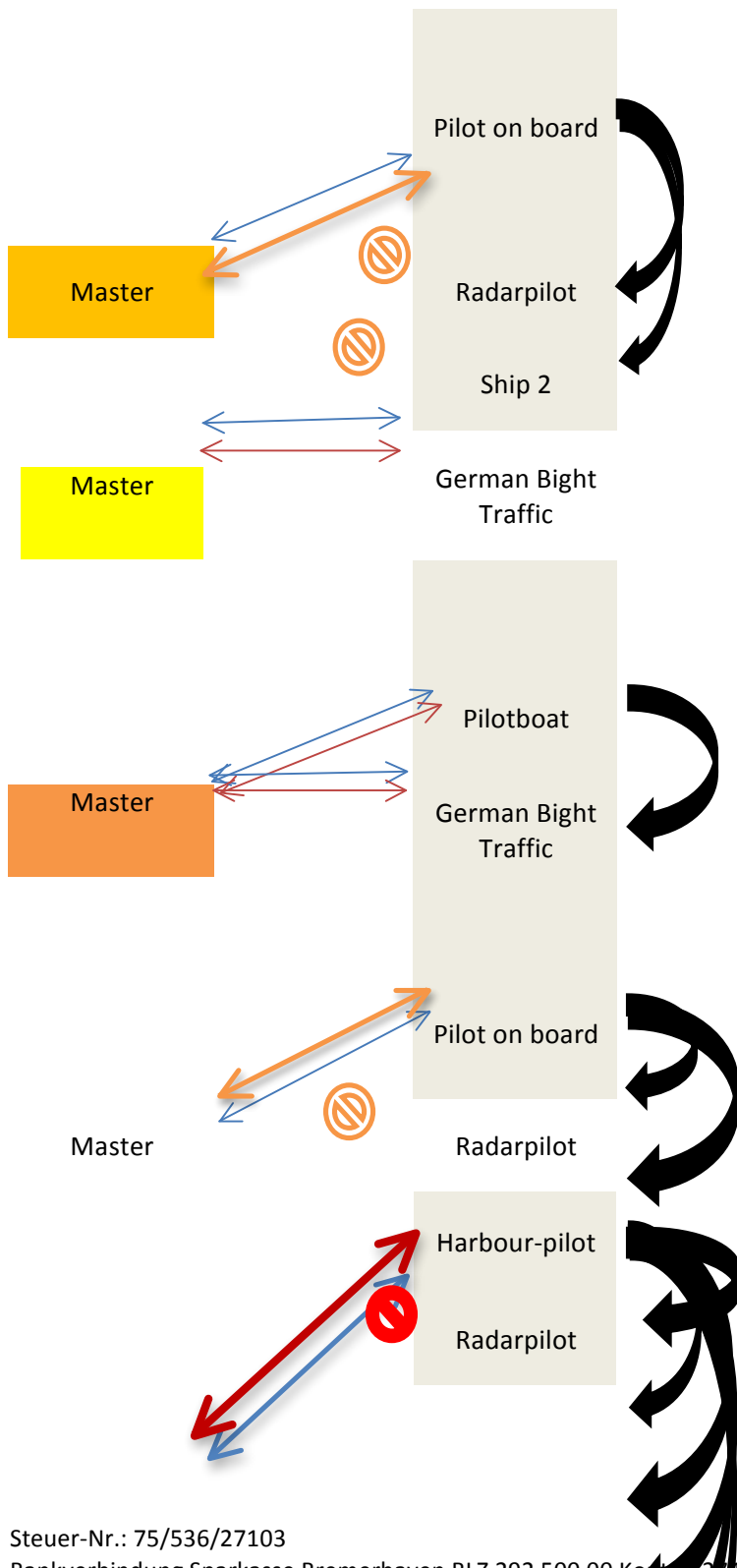
When the pilot is on board he will communicate according to the appropriate regulations with the crew and the master in the required English language.

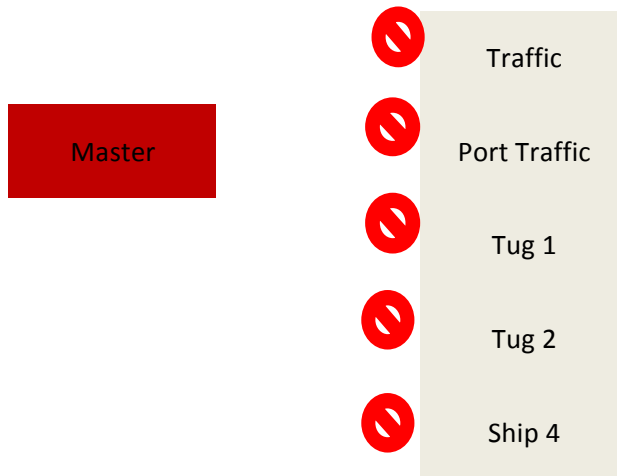
According to the local accepted customs the communication language between the pilot and any other party e.g. pilot at radar, other ships, pilots in service on a vessel in vicinity, the next pilot station or pilot boat, will change to the local language which, in our example, is German.

The situation becomes unsafe and more and more stressful for the master.

On from this moment the master is in the hands of the pilot. Master's de facto power is in the hands of third parties. The master of a vessel calling into a port is not able to understand the communication between the involved parties, **but he remains responsible** for the manoeuvring of the vessel with or without tugs.







Communication & stress:

1. Communication between pilot and other parties in local language

The communication between pilot and third parties takes place in the local language. The need of communication is increasing because the traffic is increasing. More and more information's in local language are coming in. The pilot has to select the important information's. Then the pilot has to translate this information's into English to keep the master informed.

The information flow during a manoeuvre is even higher. A pilot using local language cannot inform the master regarding his next order, because there is simply not enough time left for translation between manoeuvres to bring the vessel safe alongside the berth

2. Stress to the master

The master is aware of the situation. The pilot is doing his very best to keep the master informed.

But....

As I mentioned already, there is no time to inform the master in an appropriate time limit.

In this situation of enormous stress to the master, it can be assumed, that the master is making no, or wrong decisions due to the lack of information.

An appropriate bridge resource / team management training, a STCW requirement, shall be done in English language!

Pilots

Pilots conduct their duties with the utmost diligence. Nevertheless it must be the target of a pilot as a nautical expert and advisor of the vessel master to perform his duty in a manner that the foreign master can understand and agree any of the advises and decisions. It is a part of pilot's obligation to translate his orders (before giving any orders on behalf of the master to an involved third party) into the international working language. Under normal circumstances the working language will be English.

During the manoeuvre without tug assistance the pilot has time to explain his intentions to the master and the master can decide whether he agrees to the decision of the pilot. In practice the master will follow the advice and the pilot will act as usual. The communication base in English enables the master during the whole manoeuvre to understand the intention of the pilot and he can, if necessary, overrule the decision of the pilot as he will remain always responsible.

During the manoeuvre with a tug there is usually no time to discuss and agree a decision. One command is following the next and it is impossible to intervene or to stop the action and bring the speed down to point zero if the situation might require it. For this reason a working language understandable for all masters is essential. A working language as a part of IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) has to be developed and educated to all involved parties, improving the quality of the manoeuvres and consequently the safety of the vessel, the port and the environment.

The IMO resolution A 960 which has replaced the resolution 485 recommends several procedures for the education of trainee pilot. Pilots are obligated to fulfil the requirements of the resolution.

A sample:

Annex 2 Recommendation on operational procedures for maritime pilots....

2.2 The master, bridge officers and pilot share a responsibility for good communications and understanding of each other's role for the safe conduct of the vessel in pilotage waters.

It has not be discussed, that the communication between the captain of a tug and the vessel is in the hands of the pilot.

Is it the duty of the pilot –we remember 2.2- to speak in a working language to keep the master in a position to act according his obligations and to fulfil his duties?

Other requirements of the resolution:

Annex 2

6. Communication language

6.1 Pilots should be familiar with the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) and use them in appropriate situations during radio communications as well as during verbal exchanges on the bridge....

6.3. When a pilot is communicating to parties external to the ship, such as ...**tugs**.... and the pilot is unable to communicate in the English language..., the pilot should, as soon as practicable, explain what was said to enable the bridge personnel to monitor any subsequent actions...

Tug Captains

The job of a tug captain in Germany has changed a lot during the past years since the tugs are not only used as port-tugs anymore, but also at sea, e.g. in operating and assisting in offshore constructions. The working language in the offshore business is generally English and all crew members have to communicate in English during operations. Tug captains and crew members of leading companies are in a continuous training process to use the English language as working language which our company provides to them.

Furthermore we provide in close co-operation with a leading tug company a tailor-made solution for a simulator tug training which is close to reality as possible. In the frame of this training we will work with a basic standard vocabulary.

Some of the tug captains and their crews are working on different tugs in different ports. Consequently, the captain of a tug has to understand all commands in all ports including the language varieties of the pilot's commands in the different ports. For this reason, the tug captain's point of view is that an integration of commands in the SMCP is highly welcomed.

SMCP

IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases

IMO's Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) were adopted by the 22nd Assembly in November 2001 as resolution A.918(22) IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases.

The resolution adopts the Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) and recommends a wide circulation to all prospective users and all maritime education authorities.

The IMO SMCP replace the Standard Marine Navigational Vocabulary (SMNV) adopted by IMO in 1977 (and amended in 1985). The SMNV was developed for use by seafarers, following agreement that a common language - namely English - should be established for navigational purposes where language difficulties arise and the IMO SMCP has been developed as a more comprehensive standardized safety language, taking into account changing conditions in modern seafaring and covering all major safety-related verbal communication.

The IMO SMCP includes phrases which have been developed to cover the most important safety-related fields of verbal shore-to-ship (and vice-versa), ship-to-ship and on-board communications. The aim is to get round the problem of language barriers at sea and avoid misunderstandings which can cause accidents.

The IMO SMCP builds on a basic knowledge of English and has been drafted in a simplified version of maritime English. It includes phrases for use in routine situations such as berthing as well as standard phrases and responses for use in emergency situations.

Under the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978, as amended, the ability to understand and use the SMCP is required for the certification of officers in charge of a navigational watch on ships of 500 gross tonnage or above.

Conclusions

There are some problems discussed in the past.

One argument against **English as Working Language during Manoeuvring** is that some situations e.g. docking, undocking and other not very common situations are not so easy to describe in the required form.

After a couple of years in the business as harbourpilots we would like to point out, that there is no doubt, **more** than 95 % of the daily work is standard. Why should we **not** add this Standard to the Standard Marine Communication Phrases?

The target must take the pressure from the master.

Furthermore we can stop such kind of words like “a little” and “may be”. A command language has to be clear. If you give clear commands you get safe manoeuvres.

Han Hansen the author of the standard book "Tug use in Port" pointed out, that tug captains often speak only the local language. Furthermore he pointed out, that a change in communication procedures might result in misunderstandings.

A short and standardised language is the answer.

We have more and more English speaking crews on tugs. According to the STCW requirements companies providing training programs and in our small frame we can see the development and a really successful training.

In the accident reports mentioned in Peter Hahne's Bachelor thesis there are some communication errors and misunderstandings mentioned which are made in the present system. We believe, that a SMCP is a way to improve the safety of the vessel and the traffic on the waterways and to improve the safety of the vessel and its crew.

Nevertheless according to the resolution A 960 for the pilots it is a requirement within the advanced training to improve the English language to communicate in the future with all parties in English.

Last but not least for the safety of vessel and environment and the freedom of our masters.

Thanks for kind listening.

Kapt. Matthias Meyer