



© 2024 Ohorodnyk. This article is distributed under the terms of CC Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International as described at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>

DOI: 10.31499/2306-5532.1.2024.309766

TO COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN MARITIME ENGLISH THROUGH PROFESSIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Natalia Ohorodnyk

PhD in Education, Associate Professor,
Kherson State Maritime Academy, Kherson, Ukraine,
ORCID: 0000-0003-1831-2275; e-mail: marinemarine321@gmail.com

The article presents the findings of a research study on the relationships between the processes of future seafarers' professional identity formation and their professional English-language communicative competence development. The process of professional identity formation is characterized by evolutionary changes, which can be observed through the lens of the communicative component. These changes can be identified as actions that establish a professional communicative identity, which in turn have a direct impact on the communicative competence of future specialists.

The process of professional identification for future seafarers consists of three stages. In Stage I, Adaptation, cadets face a period of adjustment as they enter a new social and professional environment, confronting the realities of their career choice and beginning to form their professional identity. Stage II, Stabilization, involves the cadets becoming more comfortable in their roles, with an emphasis on professional training and early specialization. In Stage III, Correction, cadets engage in extended seagoing practices that deepen their professional interests and further solidify their commitment to their chosen career in maritime transport.

Keywords: professional identity, communicative competence, future seafarers, Maritime English, professional communicative identity.

У статті наведено результати дослідження взаємозв'язку процесів формування професійної ідентичності майбутніх моряків із розвитком професійної англомовної комунікативної компетентності. Процес формування професійної ідентичності, супроводжуваний еволюційними змінами, охарактеризовано крізь призму комунікативної складової. Еволюційні



фактори ідентифіковано як дії, що формують професійну комунікативну ідентичність, яка так само безпосередньо впливає на комунікативну компетентність майбутніх спеціалістів.

Ключові слова: професійна ідентичність, комунікативна компетентність, майбутні моряки, морська англійська мова, професійна комунікативна ідентичність.

Introduction. It is becoming increasingly common for professionals to view foreign language skills as a valuable social and personal asset, which can significantly enhance their career prospects. In this context, the ability of future seafarers to communicate effectively in English, whether as a working language on board or as a universal tool for understanding both during professional and everyday communication, is a key factor in their successful professional activity. It is known that a professional identity comes from an individual's awareness of the characteristics of the chosen profession and its typical work environment. It contributes to confidence in personal professional effectiveness based on an awareness of the indicators and boundaries of one's professional competence.

The importance of Maritime English competency has been officially recognized by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). It is considered to be one of the most crucial safety factors in modern merchant shipping. Therefore, the significance of communication skills in the professional identity is actualized. The manner in which these skills are acquired and refined during the professionalization process has a direct impact on the quality of speech habits and skills under formation, particularly in the context of English language professional communication.

Literature review. Due to their interdisciplinary nature, the concepts of identification and identity are relevant to many different areas of knowledge. A variety of national and international studies have identified a number of key areas that will influence the future development of specialists in the field. Various aspects of future specialists' professional development are revealed by national and foreign studies, including philosophical, social, psychological, pedagogical, and other disciplines. The content of future seafarers' professional competency, within the framework of which their professional identity is formed, is represented in the works of K. Cicek (2019), E. Ceylan, I. Ç. Kolçak, M. S. Solmaz (2022), S. A. Voloshynov (2022), G.R. Emad (2023), S. Ghosh (2024) and others. The fundamental principles of the concurrent development of professional identity and communicative competence, including future specialists' foreign language communicative competence, as well as the distinctive characteristics of their relationship and mutual influence, are revealed by V. Bocanegra-Valle (2010), C.P. Tan (2014), N. Ralph (2015), B. Johnson, R. Ulseth (2016), O. Tyron (2023), R. Sternszus (2023) et al. However, the multifaceted nature of these objects significantly expands the field of scientific research. The aspects that have already been investigated serve as the foundation for those that are currently under study or yet to be investigated.

The purpose of this article is to conduct a theoretical analysis of the interrelation and interdependence between the future seafarers' professional identity and their



Maritime English communicative competence.

Methodology. The research material was selected from the scientific works of domestic and foreign scientists in the fields of psychology, psycho-pedagogy and psycholinguistics on the issue of professional identification of young specialists in general and future seafarers in particular, as well as the role of communicative competence in their professional development. Among the methods used in studying the topic, we are interested in the analytical research of the relevant scientific data, and the determination of the interconnection and interdependence between the specified processes.

Results and discussions. The process of professional self-identification is concerned with the formation of a positive attitude towards the profession one has chosen, as well as with identifying oneself as a member of a particular professional group. The formation of students' professional identity is identified by researchers as a key factor in their professional development. The perception of oneself as a professional is reflected in future professional actions, which in turn influence the style of interpersonal interaction in the professional community. In defining the concept of professional identity, researchers posit that it is a characteristic of a person who chooses and carries out their own way of interacting with the environment, thereby achieving self-respect through the performance of this activity (Nordhall et al., 2021; Bloom, 2022).

It is evident that the development of a professional identity is significantly influenced by the academic environment of a university. According to scientists, professional education represents a pivotal factor in the readiness for professional identification. It is posited that professional education provides a quantum leap in a student's professional development due to the development of identification characteristics of his belonging to a particular profession (Bocanegra-Valle, 2010).

Meanwhile, professional identity is characterized by scientists as a systemic, dynamic and level phenomenon. As a systemic phenomenon, it has its own content and structure. Both content and structural components have a great diversity of their very ambiguous interpretations due to the authors' different methodological positions.

Nevertheless, in the majority of studies, the concept of professional identity is understood to be the integration of personal and social identity within a professional context. In this context, the future seafarers' actions on professional identification are believed to be similar to those of representatives of other professions. These actions include: self-assessment of professional qualities and characteristics, comprehension of other professionals' assessment of their personality, and harmonization of internal and external assessment.

Large discrepancies are also observed in determining the structural components of professional identity. While some components may vary depending on the specifics of the profession, the communicative component remains invariant due to the key role of the communicative competence in a general professional competence of a future specialist. It is, therefore, one of the core components of professional identity.

It follows from the thesis of psychologists that a person's understanding of any verbal works is at the same time his understanding of himself. It is therefore logical to



assume that a person's understanding of professional speech forms the basis of his professional identity. Furthermore, if speech represents a person's identity, then professional speech reveals the professional identity of the specialist (Ralf, 2015).

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has conducted a study to examine the relationship between English proficiency and the effectiveness of seafarers' professional activities. The research also revealed the degree of satisfaction exhibited by various categories of survey respondents with regards to their living conditions aboard the vessel, particularly with regards to communication issues. It revealed their level of job satisfaction, which serves as an index of their professional identification. The results indicated the level of job satisfaction among the respondents, which can be considered an indicator of their professional identification (MARCOM Project, 1999; European Commission, 2001; Bocanegra-Valle, 2010).

According to the survey findings on language difficulties in professional and everyday communication on board, three categories of respondents were identified: those who have no difficulties, those who periodically have difficulties, and those who experience constant difficulties. Everyday communication on board identified three categories of respondents: those who have no difficulties, those who periodically have difficulties, and those who experience constant difficulties. It was found that the seafarers who admitted their insufficient command of English, also indicated their own lack of professional competence.

The inability to communicate effectively, coupled with a lack of clarity regarding expectations and responsibilities, can lead to feelings of doubt, helplessness and despair, which in turn impede the ability to fulfil work responsibilities. When combined with a sense of responsibility for the effective work of the ship's crew, these factors can be reflected in the specialist's dissatisfaction with their professional role, which in turn affects their mood and attitude towards the environment. According to research, those experiencing persistent language difficulties expressed dissatisfaction with their professional activities due to a lack of proficiency in the working language (MARCOM Project, 1999; Noble et al., 2011). At the same time, it is clear that the reliability and efficiency of seafarers' work depend not only on their level of English proficiency, but also on how deeply their experience of English-language communication is integrated into the overall structure of professional competence (Bocanegra-Valle, 2010; Harth, 2013).

In their analysis of the relationship between communicative competence and professional identity, S. Parshuk and N. Kruglova argue that communication represents a crucial aspect of professional identification. This process facilitates the integration of the individual within the profession, fostering intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social integration (Parshuk & Kruhlova, 2015). For a future seafarer this means: mutual understanding with oneself, with partners, subordinates, managers and other members of the ship's crew, as well as with numerous services and representatives of the merchant fleet and the maritime industry in general.

The modern interpretation of the structure of professional identity posits that the communicative component is implicit in each of its three main components: cognitive, emotional-value and behavioral (Stolyarenko, 2012; Makarova, 2019; Nordhall et al., 2021). It is commonly accepted that full mastery of the profession is



impossible without a culture of professional communication. Consequently, it provides for:

- at the cognitive level: mastering certain features of communication, style and rules of communication in a professional environment;
- at the emotional-evaluative level: emotional stability to keep in contact and support communicative value of interaction; evaluative attitude (in terms of value and significance for oneself) towards the professional community membership as well as the type of generally accepted professional interaction (verbal and non-verbal) and coordinated communication relations;
- at the behavioral level: professional behavior imitation, which is manifested in copying (conscious or subconscious) of communicative behavior for the sake of positive professional identity.

So, the professional identity is defined by its communicative aspect, which represents the mutual correspondence between an individual and a profession. This is manifested through the process of understanding, evaluating and expressing oneself within a professional context (Bloom, 2022).

If the professional identity as an integral psychological phenomenon supposes an understanding of the profession, self-acceptance in the profession, and the ability to perform one's professional functions well and for the benefit of others (Harth, 2013; Bloom, 2022), then its communicative component from the perspective of future seafarers means:

- firstly, good command of Maritime English as a working language on board; cross-cultural awareness on the specifics of communication in mixed crews during long voyages;
- secondly, the ability to assess one's own communicative competence and to cater to the needs of both professional and everyday communication on board;
- thirdly, the ability to imitate communicative traditions for successful professional interaction, using one's own methods in establishing and maintaining communicative contacts, and coping with language barriers for the sake of successful interaction with a ship's crew.

In this instance, it appears feasible to utilize the concept of a communicative personality, designating it as a professional communicative personality in terms of the formation of the professional personality of a future specialist. The researchers posit that the student's communicative identity is a phenomenon of self-identification, with a significant impact on subjective well-being in interpersonal relations (Purnama et al., 2023).

Thus, the *professional communicative identity of future seafarers* is defined as seafarers' ability to identify their own communication skills, abilities, knowledge, and experience in providing effective cross-cultural communication in professional sphere. In other words, the professional communicative identity of future seafarers is the established similarity of their own maritime communicative competence with the corresponding competence of the international fleet professionals.

It should be noted that professional identity as a factor of the communicative competence development makes the subject of a number of studies (Noble et al., 2011;



Harth, 2013; Purnama et al., 2023). Concurrently, this also implies the impact of communicative competence on professional identity. Communication skills combined with professional knowledge and certain practical experience, in some authors opinion, “lay a stone foundation” for a competent specialist development as well as his awareness of belonging to the chosen profession (Bocanegra-Valle, 2010; Parshuk & Kruhlova, 2015).

Depending on the individual character of professional identity, the following statuses of professional identity are distinguished in modern psychology: uncertain (diffuse) identity, premature (formal or imposed) identity, delayed (moratorium) identity and formed (achieved) identity (Kochkurova, 2011; Kuzmina, 2011). Characterizing these statuses as “the steps for a person who is in the process of professional development” (Kuzmina, 2011), scientists emphasize that the formation of professional identity occurs precisely by changing its status. With the change in the status of professional identity, all components of its content, including the communicative one, undergo qualitative transformations.

The path from one status of professional identity to another, as well as its manifestation, is so individual that on any course of study within the same group, there are future specialists with different statuses of self-identification with the profession. However, there is a tendency towards a decrease in diffuse and imposed statuses, and a predominance of formed or delayed (moratorium status) professional identity (Kochkurova, 2011). Expressed in different percentages, they alternately show the prevalence of some statuses over others, but at the same time they are usually present in all possible variants. Accordingly, the professional communicative identity of future seafarers also varies due to the communicative component of the professional identity, influenced by a particular of its status.

Just like any process, the formation of a professional identity has its own stages. A review of existing periodization in the scientific literature led to the conclusion that a three-stage course of action is required. The essence of this process is adaptation, stabilization and correction of actions according to one's own professional self-determination. In summary, the stages of professional identification can be broadly defined as follows: adaptational, stabilizing and corrective. In addition, studies of the situational states of future specialists in terms of their comfortable or uncomfortable well-being at each of these stages have allowed psychologists to identify stable and unstable (critical, crisis) periods in the development of a person's professional identity (Kozyriev & Kozlovs'ka, 2013; Kochkurova, 2011).

The above-mentioned uneven and crisis-like nature of the process of professional identification shows its rather complex dynamics throughout the entire period of study. Nevertheless, positive changes in professional identification indicate a gradual transformation into a professional. In accordance with A. Kochkurova's periodization (2011), it is possible to map the following relationship between the stages of professional identification of future seafarers and their educational process flow:

Stage I - Adaptation - This is the first year of study and is characterized by the entry into a new social and professional environment, the adaptation to the new social role of a cadet, the awareness of the initial career choice during the familiarization period, as well as the formation of a value-based attitude towards it. With such



difficulties, this stage is defined by psychologists as unstable, i.e. a crisis. However, it is important for the establishment of one's own professional identity in terms of getting rid of idealized representations about the profession and further approval or disapproval of the initial choice (Kuzmina, 2011).

Stage II - Stabilization. This stage is characterized by a generally completed adaptation to the learning environment, intensive general professional training and early specialization. All this activates professional self-esteem through awareness of one's own abilities and achievements. There is also a positive or negative perception of oneself as a subject of future professional activity. Usually, this stage includes the second and third courses and is defined as stable due to the absence of any complications and difficulties during it (Kozyriev & Kozlovs'ka, 2013; Kuzmina, 2011). However, due to the peculiarities of the training process in maritime education institutions, where the curriculum requires graduates of the second year to complete a full (4 or 6 months) seagoing period, we consider it reasonable to limit this stage of professional identification of future seafarers to the second year.

Stage III - Correction. In our opinion, this stage combines the third and fourth courses of the future bachelor with a degree in river and sea transport. Long-term seagoing practices (semesters V and VII) with active participation in professional activities and direct immersion in a real professional environment contribute to strengthening and deepening the professional interests of future seafarers.

The close contact with the chosen profession, as well as the awareness of the whole range of professions inherent in the maritime industry, causes a surge of new goals and perspectives, stimulating to rethink and clarify different options for professional self-development, employment and career building. The gradual withdrawal from the collective forms of student life, doubts and emotions due to the increased reflection on one's own professional "self", as well as the intense search for ways to speed up and rationalize one's own specific training, are precisely the phenomena that, according to scientists, give reason to consider stage III as unstable and quite a crisis in the professional identification of future seafarers (Kozyriev & Kozlovs'ka, 2013; Kochkurova, 2011). Finally, it should be noted that the stages of professional identity formation do not exist separately, but are closely interrelated and interdependent (Kochkurova, 2011).

It is logical that essential changes in the structure of the professional identity at different stages of professionalization are also manifested in the dynamics of its components, particularly, communicative component, i.e. the professional communicative identity. Likewise, undergoing certain crisis changes at stages I and III, the communicative identity of future seafarers is formed unevenly. Likewise, the communicative identity of future seafarers is formed unevenly, undergoing certain crisis changes at stages I and III.

Rather unstable due to the above-mentioned intensive adaptation efforts, stage I (first year) shows either a successful adaptation or a flat unacceptance of the intensive communicative way of Maritime English acquisition. This is due to the previous (school) learning experience and the available level of English, as well as the progress made in new conditions. Even with a sufficient level of English to compare favorably with those who are lagging behind, cadets should work regularly and systematically



from the outset, given the early specialization and a certain head start in the provision of professional knowledge from a wide range of disciplines, the topics of which are covered by maritime English. Otherwise, along with cadets with insufficient English language proficiency, there is a risk of a self-sufficiency crisis for them.

Stage II (second year) is characterized by the stabilization and normalization of training activity through getting used to the already known learning algorithms and developing one's own tactics and strategies, which contribute to the individual's success in professional English-language communication.

The crisis nature of stage III is due to a long stay in sea-going practice, which has resulted in the need to find ways and means for further self-training and self-control. Furthermore, the assumption that members of a mixed crew with limited English proficiency can communicate effectively with each other, which often arises after the first sea-going practice, has a negative impact on the motivation to improve one's own English-speaking communication skills.

In consideration of the four levels of formation of the professional identity of future seafarers – unexpressed, expressed passive, active and stable – determined by their content and the presence of certain professional experience, the researchers have established the modality of the relationship between the future specialist and the profession.

With regard to the capacity to undertake specific professional activities, the modality of professional communication can be expressed by the words “I want”, “I know”, “I can” and “I do” (Stolyarenko, 2012; Makarova, 2019). Projected on the professional English-speaking communicative personality of future sailors, this means:

“I want” – I am aware of my responsibility for the quality performance of my professional functions and compliance with the requirements of the profession. I understand the role and importance of the English language for effective professional communication on the ship and I am committed to learning English for seafarers.

“I know” – I gain the necessary knowledge, master professional communication models, I know the approximate volume of professional topics and appropriate vocabulary as well as the range of its applications, etc.;

“I can” – I am able to deliver professional English-speaking speeches, develop effective communication strategies, and communicate effectively on a wide range of professional and business issues without relying on samples.

Modality “do” refers to a relationship that goes beyond the learning process. This is how a stable professional identity is characterized. This corresponds to the level of a real professional, who, thanks to the formed professional competence, high-level skills and “professional uniqueness” (Makarova, 2019), firstly, grasps the importance of professional contacts; secondly, wants to share the accumulated experience, and, finally, implements it in the most intelligible and understandable way.

The authors' research findings confirm the interdependence of communicative competence and professional identity, with both influencing each other (Stolyarenko, 2012; Makarova, 2019). Consequently, when there is an unexpressed or expressed, but passive professional identity, this is indicative of a similar status of professional communicative competence. Consequently, when there is an unexpressed or



expressed, but passive professional identity, this is indicative of a similar status of professional communicative competence. When professional identity is at an active and stable level, it is to be expected that the number of communicative contacts will increase significantly. This is largely due to the expansion of professional communication and the recognition of its importance for professional growth.

Conclusion. The development of Maritime English communicative competence is one of the key priorities of the modern education and training system for future seafarers. The extent of progress largely depends on the nature of the future seafarers' professional identity development. The level of professional identity, one of the leading structural elements of which is the communicative component, is reflected in the quality of the future seafarers' Maritime English communicative competence development. Conversely, the inverse effect takes place.

Professional communication that achieves its objective has a significant impact on self-esteem and self-perception. Effective communication fosters self-confidence and professional effectiveness, contributing to a positive professional identification. Since both processes are controllable, there are good reasons to believe that their coherent and coordinated course based on reflexive technologies of knowledge assimilation will have a positive effect on the future seafarers' language learning outcomes and contribute to their conscious control of their own professional growth.

Based on our understanding of the specifics of professional identification and professional communicative identification, which are reflexive in nature, we believe it would be beneficial to further study the methods of a reflexive educational process, which could be implemented into the Maritime English teaching and learning process. It is anticipated that these strategies will enable cadets to develop effective learning, control and assessment skills in relation to their Maritime English communication abilities.

References

- Bloom T. J. (2022). Understanding Professionalism's Interplay Between the Profession's Identity and One's Professional Identity. *American journal of pharmaceutical education*, 86(9), ajpe8956. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe8956>
- Bocanegra-Valle, A. (2010). The Language of Seafaring: Standardized Conventions and Discursive Features in Speech Communications. *International Journal of English Studies*, 11, 35-53. 10.6018/ijes.11.1.137091.
- European Commission (2001). The Impact of Multicultural and Multilingual Crews on Maritime Communication: MARCOM. *Final Reports*, 1 & 2.
- Harth, J. A. (2013). *The impact of maritime English communication training for non-native English language speakers concerning the competency of seafarers: Iraqi maritime sector case study*. [Master of science dissertation]. World Maritime University Dissertations.
- Kozyriev, M. P., Kozlovs'ka, Yu. R. (2013). Profesiine stanovlennia fakhivtsia v umovakh vyshchoho navchalnoho zakladu [Professional formation of a specialist in terms of higher education]. *Scientific Bulletin of Lviv State University of Internal Affairs (psychological series)*, 1, 305-313. (in Ukrainian)



- Kochkurova, O. V. (2011). Rol' profesiinoi identychnosti u formuvanni sotsialnoho zdorovia osobystosti [The role of professional identity in the formation of social health of an individual]. *Education of the region: political science, psychology, communication*, 2, 337-341. (in Ukrainian)
- Kuzmina, I. P. (2011). Kontsept profesiina identychnist yak predmet psykholohichnoho analizu [The concept of "professional identity" as a subject of psychological analysis]. *Bulletin of postgraduate education*, 3, 332-337. (in Ukrainian)
- Makarova, O.P. (2019) Profesiina identychnist: struktura ta osoblyvosti [Professional identity: structure and characteristics]. *Theory and practice of modern psychology*, 3 (1), 77-82. (in Ukrainian)
- MARCOM Project. (1999). *The impact of multicultural and multilingual crews on maritime communication* (Vols. 1, 2). A Transport RTD Programme, Final Report, Contract No. WA-96-AM-1181.
- Noble, A., Vangehuchten, L., Parys, W. V. (2011). Intercultural competence and effective communication at sea: an invitation to celebrate diversity on board. *Proceedings of IMEC 23 (The International Maritime English Conference)*, (131-149). Editure Nautica, Constanta Maritime University, Romania.
- Nordhall, O., Knez, I., Willander, J. (2021). Emotion and cognition in personal and collective work-identity formation: variable- and person-oriented analyses. *Heliyon*, 7 (4), 1-47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07210>
- Parshuk, S. M., Kruhlova N. S. (2015). Pedagogical communication as a component of professional identity of future primary school teachers [Pedagogichna komunikatsiia yak skladova profesiinoi identychnosti maibutnikh uchyteliv pochatkovoii shkoly]. *Pedagogical sciences: theory, history, innovative technologies*, 5 (49), 318-324. (in Ukrainian)
- Purnama, L. B., Sakilah, B. and Wida, C. (2023). Seafarers' profession in the eyes of post-apprenticeship cadets: From imagination to reality. *AIP Conference Proceedings* 2675, 040006. 10.1063/5.0114985.
- Ralph N. (2015) Communication in context: Developing a professional identity. In *Building professional nursing communication*, ed. by Lawrence J, Perrin C, Kiernan E. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Stolyarenko, O. B. (2012). *Psykhologhiia osobystosti* [Personality psychology]. Center of educational literature. (in Ukrainian)