



Milena Dževerdanović-Pejović<sup>1</sup>

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## VERBS IN THE STANDARD MARINE COMMUNICATION PHRASES AS A SUBLANGUAGE OF MARITIME ENGLISH

**Abstract:** *This paper focuses on lexical aspect making the core of the Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) – the verbs. Given that the key feature of this specific maritime sublanguage laid down by the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Standard Marine Communication Phrases is to convey precise information in English between seafarers on board and in external ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communication at sea, the semantic analysis of the verbs in the SMCP was carried out, applying theoretical knowledge in the semantic domains of verbs (Biber et al., 1999) and verb patterns (Francis et al., 1996). The discursive function of verbs and verb patterns, as well as verb phrases making up idiomatic expressions in the SMCP, is explained in the light of conceptual knowledge or knowledge of the professional (maritime) setting in which they occur. This study also supports idea that results of analysis carried out by the use of modern linguistic quantitative tools should be incorporated in teaching SMCP phrases and presented to seafarers in the form of e-documents like screenshots, concordance lists and formulaic structures. Due to lack of time spent on shore, seafarers particularly benefit from computer-based learning and prefer economic and short information.*

**Keywords:** *Standard Marine Communication Phrases, verbs, verb patterns, maritime setting*

### 1. Introduction

There have been many attempts to standardise maritime verbal ship-to-shore and ship-to-ship communications. Many languages, known as restricted languages, codes or limited languages used to standardise VHF communication aimed to overcome differences in language usage. In the light of contemporary linguistics, the Standard Marine Communication Phrases may be regarded as a specialised maritime verbal genre used among members of the maritime discourse community knowing that genre has its actors, its time and place (Frow, 2006: 7).

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor at the University of Montenegro.

The Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP) published in 2001 is an upgraded version of the Standard Marine Navigation Vocabulary previously established in 1977, and Seaspeak in 1985. All these languages known as restricted languages are characterized by highly structured discourse and plain lexis which is particularly to be used in distress situations. The SMCP deals mostly with signals and rules for opening, ending and turn-taking in conversations from general language exchanges (telephone conversations), with maritime VHF exchanges being more formal (Pritchard 2002: 12). Topics include navigational watch, helm orders, briefings on position, berthing, anchoring, pilotage and similar. As for their formal structure, SMCP phrases are divided into two parts, External and Internal Phrases: Part A and Part B. External phrases are covered in Part A, covering phrases relating to distress communications (fire, collision, grounding), search-and-rescue communications, medical assistance, safety communications and navigational warnings. Part B covers phrases used on board ship, such as handing over and taking over the watch, briefing on situations and events, reporting, on-board drills, cargo and cargo handling, passenger care and so on.

This paper is intended to complement research into the syntactical–lexical aspect of the SMCP, more precisely, verbs. In light of that, it was established that SMCP phrases mostly use the verb phrase patterns contributing to language economy making the phrases easy to memorise for students and officers. With particular reference to language economy and seafarers' profession that is characterized by need for precise and short information, it is explained why the most frequent syntactical patterns in the SMCP text are formed by relational or existence verbs and why the use of mental verbs is avoided.

Knowing that modal verbs are not recommended to be used in the SMCP (IMO SMCP 2001), the justifiability of their use is questioned within concrete communicative situations. Finally, the examples of multiple-word lexical verbs making up the idiomatic expressions of the SMCP are identified and interpreted in the maritime setting.

In light of ESP teaching that is focused on learners who have subject knowledge based on previous work and experience (Kim, 2008: 12) in the field, language interpretation of verbs and

verb phrases relies on the knowledge of the field and maritime situation in which the verb of verb phrase occurs.

An issue that is relevant to modern ESP teacher who is involved in teaching maritime English as highly globalized and international in its nature is introduction of modern technology in subject matter instruction. Seafarers who are on board ship may benefit from language formulas and patterns obtained via language software by recognizing patterns and phases (Dalton-Puffer, 2007: 42) in a specialized discourse. In the case of SMCP text, students may benefit from computer screen outputs, screen shots and files containing concordances of frequent verbs, learning in this way not only cognitive but also communicative context of the word.

## **2. Previous research**

The SMCP has been the subject of analysis, as a language of marine radio communications (VHF communications), which has been carried out by many authors (Bocanegra-Valle, 2010; Pritchard and Kalogjera, 2000; Pritchard, 2002; Dževerdanović-Pejović, 2013). The analysis focuses mainly on the level of syntax in VHF marine radio communications. Bocanegra-Valle (2010) investigated the structure of VHF messages applying knowledge of this genre laid out by Bhatia (1993) and Swales (1990) and concluded that VHF communications are structured into predictive communicative stages (moves and steps) which provide for efficient communication in English between ships and external stations in a multilingual setting. In his paper on the standardisation of maritime English and application of restricted code, such as the SMCP, Pritchard (2002) observed that standardisation and harmonisation of SMCP is necessary due to a gap between the prescribed standard and actual usage. For the sake of studying “deviations” between the norm and actual usage, he proposes the formation of a global, computer-based maritime language database and the recording of VHF communications.

In light of this, Pritchard and Kalogjera (2000) collected an authentic corpus of VHF oral communications and investigated the gap between the prescribed language requirements imposed by the SMCP and their actual use in verbal interactions in a maritime setting. This study implies that restricted code, such as the VHF used in real verbal exchanges among modern seafarers, contains many features of general language pertaining to the

syntax and lexis in telephone conversations and exchanges of questions. Distress communications were not included in the corpus of the analysis. However, in another paper on VHF communications, Dževerdanović-Pejović (2013) offers a discourse analysis of VHF conversations, showing how deviations from the SMCP linguistic rules on the plan of syntax and lexis have caused accidents to ships.

Finally, it has to be mentioned that many researchers who present their papers at the annual International Maritime English Conference tackle the issue of SMCP phrases from the angle of discourse analysis. Taken that together with nouns verbs in the SMCP make up the “core of the phrases” (Trenkner, 2005: 12), there has been an abundant “offer” in glossaries and vocabulary lists derived from the SMCP for pedagogical and commercial purposes. The author is of the opinion that the study of verbs in the SMCP has not gained deeper attention in terms of linguistic analysis of interplay between language fact and its performance.

### **3. Methodology**

The analysis in this paper makes use of the lexical software AntConc 3.4.4, in order to count the frequency of verbs and to identify frequent verb + noun collocations in the SMCP text. Standard Marine Communication Phrases text is available on the Internet and lists 27,706 words, of which 2,097 are unique. After the verbs were classified into semantic domains, knowledge of the cognitive content was used, that is, the linguistic facts were interpreted using the knowledge of concrete maritime situation. In the analysis in this paper it was confirmed that a verb can be put into more than one category, depending on context. This was particularly the case with activity verbs (Biber et al., 1999) in our corpus which may have different meanings.

After the most frequent verbs in the SMCP text were categorized according to semantic domains, the most frequent collocates made with a chosen verb were identified. One of the basic advantages of corpus linguistics analysis taken in this paper is production of word and frequency list so that one gets idea about it and at the same time it prompts a researcher to have production of concordance of the selected word (Bowker and Pearson, 2002: 119). In this light, the analysis focused on establishing concordance lines and collocations that the selected verbs make and on explaining its concrete use in the maritime

setting. As a part of ESP and EOP, Maritime English research relies to a large extent on understanding of maritime phenomena or knowledge of seafaring practice in interpreting linguistic facts. Methodology of analysis in this paper relies therefore on a mixed-method (Kim, 2008: 34) where the qualitative (interpretative) analysis complements quantitative findings.

#### 4. Analysis

The most frequent verbs were identified in the SMCP text. In this analysis it meant that the verb occurs at least 20 times in the corpus.

Verb	Frequency in SMCP	SMCP phrase and phrase number
be	845	What is wind direction and force in position...? (A1/3.3.2) There was a gale warning/tropical storm warning for the area ... at ... hours UTC (B1/1.5.14)
report	175	Stand by engine room and report. (B2/5.3.3)
have	110	I have dangerous list to port side/starboard (A1/1.1.4)
stand	82	Stand by boat/motor lifeboat no. ... for letting go and report (B2/6.2.12.)
do	66	Do you have a doctor on board? (A1/1.3.5)
require	63	I require/MV ... requires assistance (A1/1.2.1.1)
check	51	Check the launching tracks and report (B/1.4.1)
can	45	I cannot send pumps/divers (A1/1.1.2.2)
must	42	You must rig another pilot ladder (A1/4.2.4)
take	40	You must take tug(s) according to Port Regulations (A1/4.3.2.1)
go	39	Go ahead and follow me (A1/5.2.25)
keep	34	Keep clear of me/MV ... (A1/2.1.4)
stop	30	Stop engines (A1/6.2.3.5.19)
inform	22	Inform the ... coast radio station / vessels in vicinity (on radio) (B2/1.1.3)
make	22	Make a lee on your port side / starboard side (A1/4.2.14)
proceed	21	I am / MV ... proceeding to your assistance (A1/1.1.6.3)

change	20	No, the sea state is not expected to change (within the next few hours) (A1/3.1.9.1)
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Table 1: Verbs with 20 or more occurrences in the SMCP with examples

Table 2 comprises verbs with 10 to 20 occurrences in the SMCP text and the verbs from the Table 1. These are start (17), follow (15), increase (16), transfer (15), decrease (14), give (14), put (14), send (13), open (12), pick (12), wait (12), turn (11), get (10), improve (10), meet (10), pass (10), rig (10) and steer (10).

<b>Semantic domain</b>	Activity	stand, check, take, go, make, proceed, change, do, follow, transfer, give, put, send, open, pick, wait, assist, turn, get, meet, pass, rig, steer
	Mental	-
	Existence or relationship	be, have, do
	Communication	report, inform
	Occurrence	change, increase, decrease, improve
	Causative	require, help
	Aspectual	keep, stop, start

Table 2: Distribution of SMCP verbs according to semantic domains as per Biber et al. (1999:365)

As can be seen from Table 2, the majority of the SMCP verbs are activity verbs. According to Biber et. al (1999: 364) with activity verbs a subject has a semantic role of an agent and implies that the subject is involved in actions and events. In a maritime context it implies a control over situation, in which an agent like ship’s master, pilot or officer have an active control over situation as a prerequisite of safety on board and at sea.

#### 4.1. Activity verbs

Activity verbs mostly belong to a “moving group” (Francis et al., 1996), such as “to proceed”, “to stand”, “to turn”, “to open”, “to wait”, “to meet”, “to go”, “to pass”, “to follow” and “to steer”. Activity in the SMCP phrases refers to activities at sea that require constant monitoring, reporting and alertness. Thus, the verb “to stand” occurs 82 times in the SMCP sentences and represents the fourth most frequent verb in the corpus. This lexical activity verb occurs in 74 SMCP sentences with the adverbial particle “by” in the simple verb pattern v + noun where the verb can be used on its own. It is classified as a verb

belonging to a group of “hang around” verbs (Francis et al., 1996: 10) and implies waiting, not acting. Yet, in the SMCP phrases it means “being prepared and ready to react”, as in “Stand by lifeboats/life rafts” (A1/1.2.4.5.1) and in this meaning it acts as a transitive verb. It collocates with “clear” in four sentences meaning “keep away”, as in “Stand clear of the vessel and report” (B2/1.7.8), and with the preposition “on” in two examples meaning “maintaining course and speed”, as in “We will stand on” (B/1.2.3.1).

The activity verb “to proceed” implies continuing action and in the SMCP phrases it refers to the progression of a voyage and heading for a certain position or direction, as in “Proceed with your voyage” (A1/1.1.11.8.2).

The verb “to go” refers to a change of place (course, heading or position) and collocates with many adverbs used to denote place or direction (aboard/ahead/astern). Adverbs of place, condition or direction in the SMCP are the most distinctive functional words contributing to the precision of information regarding position as in “Go ahead and follow me” (A1/5.2.2.5).

The verbs “to turn” and “to open” also form a group of verbs of motion referring to a change of posture or orientation. The verb “to turn” is present in ten and “to open” in eight examples. This verb is associated with one of the manoeuvring operations and refers to the process of undergoing a change to either its direction (bow/stern) or side (port/starboard), as in “Turn port side/starboard side to windward” (B2/3.2.13). “To open” is used to refer to cargo operations in the SMCP sentences, as in “Open all hatches before loading/discharging” (B3/1.1.4.1) and to handling liquid goods (B3 – Preparing Safety Measures) where it is followed by the nouns “valve”, “container” or “locker” as direct objects.

The activity verb “to check” has a high frequency in the SMCP phrases (Table 1). Interestingly, its occurrence is in a pair with the verb “to report”, which adds a strong rhetorical effect and emphasises the need for precision and control over the undertaken activities on board. The position of the ship, the condition of the lines and the anchor must be checked at intervals, as must the lifesaving equipment on board, the fuel and the oil. Checking precedes reporting, which is confirmed in thirty-five SMCP phrases where the verbs “to check” and “to report” (see 3.1.4) appear together and this confirms that language

reveals a lot about the real world specificities. Examples of this are SMCP sentences, such as “Check the escape routes and report (B2/1.3.1) or “Check the launching tracks and report” (B2/1.4.1).

#### 4.2. *Mental verbs*

This group of verbs is not found in the SMCP, as they might be ambiguous in the context of SMCP communications. The aim of the SMCP is to avoid ambiguity, so it is recommended to avoid verbs that might be confusing, such as verbs of thinking or opinion. Semi-lexical or semi-functional words belonging to the semantic field of cognition and inferring mental process are hardly ever used in the SMCP (Pritchard 2002), such as the verbs “to think”, “to consider” and “to state”. Bearing this in mind, sentences such as “I think you should alter course to...” or “I think you are on a collision course” are to be replaced by more concrete phrases, as in the example “You are running into danger – risk of collision (with a vessel bearing ... degrees, distance ... kilometres / nautical miles)” (A1/6.2.2.3.7).

#### 4.3. *Existence and relationship verbs*

Verbs of existence present in the SMCP, such as the most frequent verb “to be”, are used to express existence or relationship. The verb “to be” occurs 30 times in so-called “existential clauses” (Biber et al. 1999) in the SMCP phrases, in the pattern there + be + NP. For example, in the SMCP sentences “There is heavy traffic / ... in the area” (B1/1.2.6) or “There are fishing boats in the area” (B1/1.2.6.1), the nouns making up the noun phrase are referred to as notional subjects, and the main function of such phrases is to present unknown information. It is noticed that in most cases with the existential “there is/are” in the SMCP phrases, reference is made to occurrences and objects outside the vessel (gales, heavy traffic in the areas, danger to navigation), but in a few sentences existential phrases are used to denote activities on board, usually related to engine operation and condition, such as a breakdown or blackout of the engine (“There was an engine alarm at ... hours UTC due to ...” (B1/1.7.1) or “There is no pumping at present” (B1/1.10.1).

The verb “to be” mainly occurs as a copular verb linking a noun phrase with a subject predicative. It is also categorised as a link verb or v link forming a v adjunct pattern (as in “the cables are clear” (A2/3.5. 10.1) or with the third person singular of the



verb “to be” as in “the pilot ladder is unsafe”. The adjectives “available”, “clear”, “free” and “operational” are found in as many as 26 examples.

The verb “to be”, in six examples, acts as a link verb in the simple past tense “there was a breakdown of the main engine(s) (at ... hours UTC / from ... to ... hours UTC” (B1/1.11.1). As the main verb, “to be” is used to form passive sentences, as in “Visibility is expected to be variable between ... metres / nautical miles in your position ...” (A1/3.1.2.2.3).

The verb “to be” acts as an auxiliary verb forming the present progressive tense in 133 examples in SMCP phrases with activity verbs relating to current movement in the fairway or changes of the position of ship(s). Such verbs in the SMCP text are “to steer”, “to pass”, “to change”, “to turn”, “to move”, “to stand by” and “to cross” or verbs regarding meteorological information about the state of the sea such as “to fall”, “to increase”, “to decrease”, “to veer”, “to back”, “to rise”, as in “The tide is rising / falling” (A1/3.1.4.3). Apart from where the simple present tense and the present continuous tense is used as the main verb in SMCP phrases, the verb “to be” occurs in the future tense in 54 SMCP sentences, as in “Your berth will be clear at ... hours UTC” (A1/6.2.7.1).

As regards interrogative sentences, the verb “to be” is characteristic of sentences with the question word “what” in as many as 80 SMCP sentences. Following the rule given in the introduction to the SMCP, the structuring of SMCP sentences is based on the pattern identical + invariable part of the utterance. This means that the identical part “what is” is used as an invariable base and there are many complements to this (draft, position, course, heading, visibility, etc.). Thus, the answer to the question “What is the visibility at your position?” may take on a variety of sentence forms generated according to this pattern.

The verb “to have” is the third most frequent verb in the SMCP and mainly acts as a transitive lexical verb. It is present in 60 SMCP phrases. It is used to express possession in the first person singular in 20 SMCP sentences, while it occurs in the third person singular of the present simple tense in 14 examples. It appears in 15 interrogative sentences starting with “Do you have...?” The main phrase indicating an answer, starting with “I have” or “MV ... has”, is complemented by alternative answers to

the question and provides an easily memorised discursive pattern, as is the case with the verb “to be”.

Example:

2.1 Do you have any list?

2.1.1 Yes, I have a list to port / starboard of ... degrees.

2.1.2 No, I have no list. (A1/6.1) or/ ... (A1/3.3.3)

“To have” acts as a main lexical verb in the SMCP, marking different kinds of logical relations. The verb “to have” in the imperative means “prepare” or “arrange” in 13 SMCP phrases. For example: “Have your crew on standby for heaving up anchor when the pilot embarks” (A1/6.2.3.2.6) or “Have fenders ready forward and aft” (A2/3.7.2).

However, “to have” may also have the meaning “take over responsibility of” (the watch or duty on-board ship), as in “I have the watch now” (B1/1.13.1.1) or “You have the watch now” (B1/1.13.2.1). This formal handover of the watch on board is followed by an organised and repetitive discourse, just as is the case with helm orders where the helm order given by the deck officer has to be repeated by the helmsman.

Finally, as regards the use of the verb “to have” as an auxiliary, it forms the perfect aspect, with the personal pronoun “I” in 13 sentences and the third person singular in 23 SMCP sentences, as in “I have / MV ... has collided” (A1/1.1.3.1).

As mentioned, for the sake of making the SMCP sentences as simple as possible to its users (seafarers), the use of complex tenses such as the present perfect is avoided. However, whenever it is used in the SMCP, the present perfect tense is used to indicate a (maritime) situation that has started in the recent past and, as such, has an important impact on the present maritime situation – and therefore requires immediate reaction. For example, the phrases: “I have / MV ... has lost dangerous goods of IMO-Class ... in position ...” (A1/2.2.1) or “I have lost radar contact” (A1/6.1.2.1.15), all refer to actions that require some kind of response and reaction to be undertaken by a ship, ships, VTS or shore authorities. The verb “to have” is found as a semi-modal in only three examples of the SMCP phrases, given that the modal “must” is used instead to express obligation.

The verb “to do” is classified as an activity verb but in the context of SMCP it acts as an existence or relationship verb. It is

used as an auxiliary in 60 SMCP sentences for the formation of interrogative questions in the simple present tense, while it is present in the negative form in 12 sentences. There is no evidence of the use of the verb “to do” as the lexical verb meaning “perform”. A very important syntactical rule of the SMCP given in the introduction to the IMO’s SMCP clearly indicates that contracted forms such as “can’t” and “don’t” are to be replaced by their full forms, i.e. “cannot” or “do not”. Thus “do not” is present in 32 imperative SMCP sentences. The rhetorical effect when the word “not” is used in its full form adds the force of prohibition in a situation: “Warning! Do not jettison IMO-Class cargo!” (A1/1.1.6.1) or collective prohibition related to safety regulations and communications on board ship, as in “do not forget to take your lifejackets and blankets with you (B4/1.2.4.2.2) or “do not go to the lifeboat station until ordered to do so” (B4/1.2.4.2.5).

#### *4.4. Communication verbs*

The second most frequent verb in the SMCP sentences is the communication verb “to report”. As a communication verb it is most common found in the pattern verb + noun + to + noun, as reporting involves a subject to whom we communicate some events (e.g. “We reported his behaviour to a judge”). In this meaning, it is only used once in the SMCP sentences in VTS communications – when the use of the verb “to report” implies guilt or punishment (Francis et al., 1996). For example: “Your actions will be reported to the authorities” (A1/6.2.3.4).

In the SMCP sentences, the verb “to report” most commonly appears at the end of the sentence and acts as an intransitive verb. It implies that a certain institution or authority will be notified about the action undertaken by the subject or it will be entered into the ship’s forms. For example: “Secure the danger area and report” (B2/2.3.6).

The verb “to report” is also found in the pattern verb + noun where the verb to report implies communication, as in “write” or “register”. For example: “Report the number of all persons / passengers / crew members at the assembly stations” (B2/1.6.1) or “Report the number of injured persons” (B2/1.8.3).

Good communication and reporting on board constitute, apart from routine work related to navigation, the second most common obligatory element on board. The amount of administrative work on a modern ship is increasing. More than

ever in the maritime past, seafarers are required to write, fill in, register and electronically input data into formatted reports. Every action must be duly reported. It is of course of prime importance to report accidents and non-conformities, any suspicious acts and deviations from regular activities.

The action of reporting is intertwined with repetition and redundancy as an inevitable part of naval discourse. As regards berthing operations (A2/3.7), the verb “to report” is extensively employed in reporting the distance of the ship from the mooring pier and in reporting the position as in a “handing-over-the-watch” situation (SMCP, B2/1). Therefore, if discourse reflects non-linguistic aspects, it can be concluded that reporting represents the most frequent activity in the SMCP phrases, that is, it is the most frequent of maritime activities on board ship.

#### *4.5. Verbs of occurrence*

Occurrence verbs found in the SMCP phrases, such as “to change”, “to increase” and “to decrease”, are not that frequent. This group of verbs indicates an action that occurs regardless of volitional activity (Biber et al. 1999), i.e. the subject is affected by some kind of occurrence. However, it is worth noting that in SMCP sentences these verbs mainly depict meteorological conditions as something that does not depend on a person’s will. In a linguistic sense, this non-dependence on humans and their control are expressed by the passive of the verb “to expect”, as in “wind expected to increase/decrease”. Other non-volitional occurrences mainly refer to sea conditions (expected to decrease/increase), the wind (expected to increase/decrease or change direction), visibility and thickness of ice. For example: “Thickness of ice is expected to increase/decrease in your position/area around ...” (A1/3.1.3.2.2).

As regards volitional activities controlled by humans in navigation, the verbs “to increase” and “to decrease” collocate with the nouns speed, distance and pressure. The verb “to change” also refers to actions controlled and performed by a human (navigator) and in the SMCP context it refers to a change of course, direction, radar range or VHF channel. For example: “Change to a larger/smaller range scale” (A1/6.2.2.1.12.2). In this context when the action is volitional and controlled by man, these verbs may be categorized as activity verbs.

#### *4.6. Causative verbs*

Bearing in mind the variety of requirements aimed at safe navigation, it is justifiable to expect a high frequency of the verb “to require” (Biber et al. 1999). The verb “to require” belongs to a group of causative verbs implying that some person or inanimate entity should cause a new state of affairs, a change. As regards the SMCP phrases, in 27 examples the verb “to require” goes with the first person pronoun, as in “I require”, and 21 times in the third person singular (MV ... requires). It is present in the question “What kind of assistance is required?” in six SMCP examples and “Do you require...?” in five SMCP examples. It appears in the simple verb pattern verb phrase + noun. As regards nouns in the function of noun phrases followed by the verb “to require”, it is established that the most frequent collocate is the noun “assistance”, appearing 20 times in the SMCP. The noun “pilot” appears 12 times and the noun “tug” eight times. This implies that the syntactical pattern I/MV (name of the vessel) + require(s) + noun is applied to generate verbal requirements in 48 SMCP phrases, excluding interrogative and negative sentences. The verb “to help” is rare in SMCP sentences (there are only two examples in the SMCP) and it is worth noting that the noun assistance is used in lieu of the verb “to assist”. The noun assistance (fire-fighting assistance, ice-breaker assistance, medical assistance, tug assistance) appears in compounds as block language (Bocanegra-Valle, 2010:12) and the use of a Latinism is preferred over other solutions.

#### *4.7. Aspectual verbs*

Aspectual verbs such as “to start”, “to stop” and “to begin” indicate the stage of progress of some activity or event (Biber et al. 1999: 361). These verbs in SMCP sentences are associated with navigational operations or actions taken by crew on-board ships. They form simple verb patterns such as verb phrase. Regarding navigational activities, it is very important to state the exact time and place when the events started or stopped, as this information might be crucial in case of post-accident trials. For instance, in safety-related verbal communications (A1/1.2.3) such as search-and-rescue operations, “to start” is used to indicate the exact time of the start of operations. For example: “Carry out search pattern ... starting at ... hours UTC” (A1/1.2.3.6).

As regards meteorological warnings, “to start” is used to state the exact time when new meteorological changes or occurrences (storms or gales) are expected. The verb “to begin” is used only once in the SMCP, as the verb “to start” is used instead. The verb “to stop” is classified among the 20 most frequent verbs in the SMCP (Table 1). In SMCP sentences, this is used as a transitive verb followed by nouns (listing, search, spillage and engine) and implies volitional actions undertaken by the crew.

#### 4.8. Modal verbs in the SMCP

The modals that occur more than 20 times in the SMCP (Table 3) are “must” and “can”.

Modal verb	Frequency in SMCP
Must	42
Can	45
May	4
Might	-
Need	8
Should	1

Table 3: Frequency of modal verbs in SMCP phrases

The modal “must” is used to express strict obligation or necessity usually prescribed by a ship’s master or a pilot. In this light, the use of “must” is deontic implying that the speaker (here master and pilot) lays down the rule and has authority. To illustrate this, there is an order given by ship’s pilot saying “You must rig another pilot ladder” (A1/4.2.4). Examples of deontic modality where the authority is vessel traffic service is seen in phrases: “You must arrive at waypoint ... at ... hours UTC – your berth is clear” (A1/6.2.3.8).

As regards prescriptive discourse, there has been a significant rise in the use of the verb “must” and its usage, together with “be to” and this trend is explained by the fact that it is becoming a substitute for “shall” as there is tendency to exclude its use in legal texts (Aarts, Close and Wallis, 2013:12). And indeed, the use of the modal “shall” to indicate prescription in the SMCP text is not registered.

The use of the second person plural “you” with the verb “must” is also generic as it covers as many participants in

navigation as possible and it intensifies the authority of the person/institution prescribing the rule. Hence, the modal “must” is found in part B4 of the SMCP (“Passenger Care”) relating to safety-related behaviour on board ship. Crew and passengers must comply with certain on-board rules, as is the case with the possession of personal life-saving equipment. For example: “Damage control team must have protective clothing/safety helmets/lifejackets.” (B2/4.2.3.10.1).

In most cases in SMCP sentences “can” is used to indicate ability. For example: “Can you make a rendezvous in position ...? (A1/1.3.6). The negative form “cannot” occurs in 20 sentences and refers to the lack of possibility to carry out some operation, as in “I cannot establish which part is aground” (A1/1.14.3.2). However, “can” is also used in interrogative sentences when any subject in seafaring asks for certain permission as in “In what position can I take the pilot?”

“Need” is present in four sentences in the SMCP, while in four sentences in the form “need not” it refers to a lack of obligation, as in “you need not take tug(s)” (A1/4.3.1.2).

The modal verb “may” is used only in part B4 – Passenger Care of the SMCP in the example “You / MV ... may stop, search and proceed with voyage” (A1/1.2.4.13). “May” is found in one sentence in part A1 – Performing/Co-ordinating SAR Operations, and in three examples in part B4/3 (Attending to Passengers in an Emergency), as in “The key may be collected at the information desk” (B4/1.2.3.1). Therefore, the use of “may” is not typical for tasks relating to navigation and messages to be conveyed in ship-to-shore communication. Analogously, the modal “should” is found in only one SMCP sentence in part B4/1.2 – Briefing on Safety Regulations, Preventive Measures and Communications, in “Assistance should arrive within approximately ... hours” (B4/1.2 4.2.9).

As recommended in the Introduction to the IMO’s SMCP, modal verbs are classified as ambiguous words used in the maritime context, especially in vessel traffic communications. Thus, the use of message markers as kind of performatives is recommended instead. For example, the SMCP sentences “May I enter the fairway?” or “Can I enter the fairway?” should be introduced by the appropriate message marker as in “Question: Do I have permission to enter the fairway?” This rule relates to modals “might”, “should” and “could”.

#### 4.9. Multiple-word lexical verbs to keep, to make, to get and to give

The verbs “to keep”, “to make”, “to get” and “to give” form a specific group of verbs in the SMCP. Phrasal verbs are typical of all registers and express a kind of recognisable linguistic tool of professional discourse communities. Some phrasal verbs and expressions from specified languages become a part of everyday language, as is the case with Maritime English idioms “to be all at sea” meaning “confused” (Čulić and Kalebota, 2013: 113). In each language for specific purposes it is important to know the meaning of the phrase, as it cannot be retrieved by word-for-word translation.

The verb “to keep” occurs in the pattern *v + noun* phrase, and the nouns or noun groups in the function of a direct object are “this area”, “my vessel”, “me”, “towing lines” and “fairway”.

The screenshot of the verb “to keep” is displayed below and, as previously mentioned in the text, this kind of visual representation is valuable learning aid to students in learning language in context.

N	Concordance	Set	Tag	Word #	Sen	Para	Para	lead	sec	sec	File	%
1	by for assistance. 7 Vessels must ~ keep clear of this area / area ... ~			8,512	77420%	89827%			032%		SMCP.txt	33%
2	to the emergency anchorage. 4 Keep clear of ... / avoid ... 5 You have			7,969	72033%	81929%			030%		SMCP.txt	31%
3	No, the propeller(s) is/are not clear. 13 Keep the propeller(s) clear. 2 Are			11,875	04450%	06128%			044%		SMCP.txt	45%
4	MV ... is manoeuvring with difficulty. 4 Keep clear of me / MV ... 5 Navigate			2,051	21438%	25633%			0 8%		SMCP.txt	8%
5	14 The tug(s) is / are fast (on ...). 15 Keep clear of towing line(s). 16 Stand			11,827	03450%	06125%			044%		SMCP.txt	44%
6	2 Large vessel is leaving the fairway. keep clear of the fairway approach. 3			8,470	76952%	89232%			031%		SMCP.txt	32%
7	/ area ... ~ navigate with caution. 8 Keep clear of ... - search and rescue in			8,533	77518%	90118%			032%		SMCP.txt	33%
8	in the lifeboat / liferaft immediately. 6 Keep your lifejackets on. 7 Provisions			26,581	39450%	02130%			039%		SMCP.txt	99%
9	course ... degrees. 5.1 Advise you ~ keep your present course. ~ steer a			7,838	71231%	80330%			029%		SMCP.txt	30%
10	has abandoned vessel / MV ... 16 Keep sharp lookout for lifeboats /			1,578	16921%	19811%			0 6%		SMCP.txt	6%
11	your engines. 9 Stop engines. 10 Keep a distance of ... metres / cables			5,011	47320%	52320%			019%		SMCP.txt	19%
12	3 All vessels in vicinity of position ... keep sharp lookout and report to ... 4			875	8439%	11253%			0 3%		SMCP.txt	3%
13	gases in contact with water. 4.1 Keep these goods dry. 5 These goods			22,663	05450%	71430%			034%		SMCP.txt	84%
14	4 Start / stop pumping stops. 5 Keep a safe working pressure. B3/1.4			24,028	20413%	8035%			039%		SMCP.txt	89%
15	to load / discharge in ... minutes. 13 Keep a safe working pressure. 14			23,737	16413%	8035%			038%		SMCP.txt	88%
16	and actions in lifeboats / liferafts 1 Keep a sharp lookout for persons in the			26,632	3943%	0217%			039%		SMCP.txt	99%
17	/ heavy list / serious damage / ... 2 Keep calm. There is no reason to panic.			26,775	4030%	0330%			039%		SMCP.txt	99%
18	room. 4 Bridge team / lookouts 1 Keep sharp lookout for signals /			20,981	90411%	5213%			078%		SMCP.txt	78%
19	overboard" - throw lifebuoys overboard - keep your eyes on the person in the			25,934	3545%	98 8%			036%		SMCP.txt	96%
20	on port / starboard bow. 12 H. MV ... keep the wind on port / starboard quarter			4,650	43946%	48746%			017%		SMCP.txt	17%
21	~ proceed by the fairway / route ... ~ keep to the ... (cardinal points)/half			8,663	78040%	91720%			032%		SMCP.txt	33%
22	position and wait for the pilot. 14 Keep the pilot boat to the ... (cardinal			9,303	84314%	99714%			034%		SMCP.txt	36%
23	... degrees and ... knots. 11 H. MV ... keep the wind on port / starboard bow.			4,638	43816%	48616%			017%		SMCP.txt	17%
24	against sun / rain / shipping seas. 8 Keep the deck cargo of ... (cargo) wet /			25,032	2827%	0427%			039%		SMCP.txt	93%
25	is to call out: "Steady on ..." 13 Keep the buoy / mark / beacon / ... on			10,153	88121%	05 7%			038%		SMCP.txt	39%
26	in easy. 14.1 Heave alongside. 15 Keep the ... line(s) / ... spring(s) tight. ...			12,085	0630%	06 13%			045%		SMCP.txt	45%
27	of persons recovered is: ... 2.2 Keep lookout for further persons in water			16,085	4040%	1130%			050%		SMCP.txt	59%
28	cutting the manila lashing if required. 9 Keep yourself in the centre plane of the			5,154	49118%	54218%			019%		SMCP.txt	19%
29	15 Steer ... degrees to make a lee. 16 Keep the sea on your port quarter /			4,274	39818%	44118%			016%		SMCP.txt	16%
30	... hold(s). 4 Check the preventers. 5 Keep within the safe working load of			22,208	0125%	6525%			032%		SMCP.txt	83%

Illustration 1: Screenshot of the verb “to keep” in the SMCP

Source: (Dževerdanović-Pejović, 2012: 93)

By looking at the above illustration, students can better grasp difference between denotative and connotative meaning of



the verb “to keep”. The first is illustrated in phrase “Keep the sea on your port quarter” whereas the latter is illustrated in “Keep a sharp lookout for persons in the water” where “keep lookout” means “observe”. Likewise, “to keep” is a constituent part of the collocation “to keep clear of” meaning “to be at distance from” in five SMCP examples.

The verb “to get” belongs to a group of the most common verbs in each register. The verb “to get” combines with a variety of adverbial particles and acts as a lexical verb with its own meaning. It is extensively employed in a variety of meanings and as a part of idiomatic multiple-word phrases (Biber et al., 1999: 364). The SMCP phrase “to get underway”, as in “I am ready to get underway” (A1/6.1.14.3), meaning “I am ready to set sail/depart”, occurs in nine sentences in the SMCP. It has to be learned by heart as its meaning might not be elicited at first hand by word-for-word translation. To this end, by using a concordance search as seen in Illustration 1, students can better overcome “problematic distinctions between words and phrases that cause learners problems more effectively than by relying on (brief) descriptions offered in language manuals” (Wilson et al., 2014:217).

The verb “to make” is a transitive activity verb that, together with the verb “to get”, belongs to a group of the most common phrasal verbs in each register. Besides its lexical meaning as in “make a lee”, “make a boarding speed” generated according to a simple verb pattern verb + noun phrase, this verb produces idioms that nautical students must learn by heart. Interesting phrases with the verb “to make” found in the SMCP phrases are “make fast” found in six sentences meaning “to tie” or “secure” (ropes to bollards, for instance). For example: “Your vessel is in position – make fast” (A1/6.2.3.3.14). My classroom work with each generation of students has confirmed that the phrase “make fast tug” is interpreted as something like “increase the speed of the tug” rather than “fasten the tug”. Another example is “make water” in the sentence “Making water in ...” (B2/3.2.6.4) meaning taking in water on board ship.

Taken that an idiomatic point of view offers a new way of grasping logical and rationalistic rules, it can be said that an analogy between the real world and language conventions can be easily grasped with the help of language intuition and creativity (Gavioli, 1996: 51). In light of this, in the context of the situation

on-board, seafarers might easily guess that the phrase “make water” is associated with an ingress of water or flooding on-board ship. This means that an understanding of conceptual knowledge is interrelated with pragmatic knowledge or specialised knowledge.

The verb “to give” also forms idiomatic phrases in the SMCP phrases. It occurs in the idiomatic expression “to give way” in seven sentences and means “to be at a distance” or “keep out of the way” of another vessel. The phrasal verb “to give way”, as in “the vessel will give way” (B1/1.2.2.1), by means of conversion has given rise to the noun compounds “give-way vessel”, in analogy with the verb “to stand on” and the noun “stand-on vessel”. In addition, the idiom “give a wide berth means” “to keep clear of” or “to avoid” something, as in “wide berth requested” (A1/3.2.5.3.2). The first possible scenario is that a particular ship needs a large mooring space at the quay. The second and correct interpretation of the phrase “wide berth requested” is that other ships in the vicinity have “to keep clear” of a certain part of the fairway (due to danger, obstruction or any operation such as diving, dredging and so on).

## **5. Conclusion**

The focus of this paper was on the verbs making up the core of the SMCP phrases. Firstly, the most frequent SMCP verbs are classified according to semantic domains (Biber et al., 1999). It is shown why activity verbs have the greatest prominence in the SMCP and why the use of modals is avoided. After this classification, the aim was to show which verb patterns (Francis et al., 1996) are formed by these verbs in generating SMCP phrases. In light of that, it was established that SMCP phrases mostly use a verb phrase pattern making the phrases easy to memorise by students and officers. Of the explored verbs, it was found that the existential verbs “to be”, “to do” and “to have” are extensively employed to express many conditions and logical relations on board ship and at sea. Furthermore, the verbs “to report”, “to check” and “to require” are also frequent in the SMCP phrases, and are used to achieve a rhetorical function in the maritime context – to maintain control over the situation on board, to have everything checked and reported. This military environment is also visible in the structure of helm orders, and in the repetition and redundancy in verbal communication.

Frequent phrasal verbs and idioms examined in the paper include phrasal expressions with the verbs “to make”, “to get” and “to give”, as in “make fast”, “make water”, “get underway” and “give a wide berth”. Although the application of such phrases may be questionable from the viewpoint of proper interpretation, Maritime English is decipherable within its discourse community and by the members of that community.

Future students and seafarers might benefit from the research carried out in this paper as a supplement to practical work or textbooks on the SMCP. Given that seafarers have insufficient time to learn English as the main language of maritime communication, integration of formulae and pragmatic insight into the use of verbs can be integrated into the syllabus in the Maritime English classroom. Finally, integration of computer-processed language analysis results can valuably help seafarers’ in becoming familiar with specialized lexical items through production of e-lexicography lists, concordance lines and word patterns.

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