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**MIGRANT NETWORKS, LANGUAGE LEARNING
AND TOURISM EMPLOYMENT**

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relationship between migrants' social networks, the processes of language acquisition and tourism employment. Data collected using netnography and interviews are used to identify the strategies that Polish workers in the UK use to develop their language skills. The paper highlights the roles played by co-workers, co-nationals and customers in migrants' language learning, both in the physical spaces of work and the virtual spaces of internet forums. It also shows how migrant workers exchange knowledge about the use of English during different stages of their migration careers: prior to leaving their country of origin and getting a job, during their employment and after leaving their job. Implications for academic inquiry and human resource management practice are outlined.

KEY WORDS: EU enlargement; Polish; migrants; tourism employment; language learning; networks; virtual; netnography

1. Introduction

Existing work has highlighted that tourism employment provides opportunities for migrants to develop their language skills (Anderson, Ruhs, Rogaly & Spencer, 2006; Eade, Drinkwater & Garapich, 2006; Janta & Ladkin, 2009; Janta, Ladkin, Brown & Lugosi, 2011). Previous research has also highlighted the importance of language in the migrant experience and in the management of a diverse workforce. Linguistic competence helps migrants to adjust better to life in receiving destinations (Brown, 2008), while its absence can limit access to information or support, leading to social exclusion (Spencer, Ruhs, Anderson & Rogaly, 2007). Moreover, language skills can be utilised further by mobile individuals when returning to their country of origin or when moving to new areas (Williams & Baláž, 2008). There is also a relationship between host linguistic competence and migrant employment experiences (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003). Many migrants are able to enter jobs within the tourism and hospitality sector, mainly in back of house positions, with hardly any knowledge of the local language. However, poor linguistic skills often force migrant workers to occupy the lowest grade jobs, endure poor working conditions and limit promotional opportunities (Wright & Pollert, 2006). The problem is exacerbated as migrants working in enclaves speak their own language, which reinforces ghettoisation (Adler & Adler, 1999). Finally, from a management perspective, previous research has suggested that deficiencies in language capabilities can lead to tensions in the workplace and a decrease in service quality (Devine, Baum, Hearn & Divine, 2007a, 2007b; Lucas & Mansfield, 2008; Lyon & Sulcova, 2009).

This body of work stresses the importance of linguistic competence for numerous stakeholders, but previous research has not examined in any detail the *processes* and *agencies* involved in language development among migrant workers in tourism; nor has it considered the relationship between the processes of migrants' language learning and tourism employment. In response to this gap in knowledge, this paper examines how networks of

people interact, both in physical and virtual environments; and, how flows of information, often between loosely connected individuals (Granovetter, 1983), at various stages in travel and movement, are involved in the process of language development. Moreover, we argue that tourism employment is at the core of these networks and flows of information in several ways. Firstly, tourism employment creates contexts for learning and facilitates the development of interactions and relationships that lead to specific learning repertoires. Secondly, among migrants interacting in virtual environments (i.e. internet chat rooms and social networking sites), tourism employment often stimulates debates between users. For example, tourism employment emerges frequently in discussions about developing language skills. Within these virtual environments, migrants also reflect upon their learning and their experiences of tourism employment. Furthermore, they assist other migrants in developing their language skills to help them gain employment in tourism and related sectors. In this paper, data are used to demonstrate how migrant workers exchange knowledge about the use of English during different stages of their migration career: prior to leaving their country of origin and getting a job, during their employment and after leaving their job.

The emerging themes from this study thus inform contemporary research on migration and tourism (e.g. Janta, Brown, Lugosi & Ladkin, 2011; Janta, Ladkin, Brown & Lugosi, 2011) by helping to understand the complex relationships that migrants are engaged in as they develop their language skills. Moreover, the data help us to appreciate how migrants' experiences of learning are mediated and influenced by tourism employment. Examining migrants' language development is also important for tourism and hospitality practitioners for two reasons: firstly, understanding the *modus operandi* of international employees can help in the recruitment process to identify expectations from engaging in tourism employment. Secondly,

understanding why migrants work and the processes of language learning can inform both staff development investment and the management of a diverse workforce.

This paper's findings are drawn from a wider study on the experiences of Polish migrant workers employed in the UK tourism sector; however, the emerging themes of the study, particularly around the forms and processes of interaction, and the central role of tourism employment, can be used in the analysis of other migrant groups and international contexts.

2. Literature review

In order to understand the complex relationship between migrants' networks, language learning and tourism employment it is necessary to consider several areas of literature: firstly, migrant mobilities and networks; secondly, learning theories and language learning among migrants; and thirdly, the nature of tourism employment, with particular reference to migrant workers. We begin by considering the relationship between migrant mobilities and networks.

2.1 Migrant mobilities and networks

Current research within the broader mobilities paradigm has stressed that contemporary society is characterised by the continuous movement of people, objects, capital and information (Duncan, Scott & Baum, 2009; Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006). An emerging challenge, therefore, is to understand the complex networks, interactions and relationships that emerge within mobile societies. There is a well established and expanding body of work that has considered the relationship between migration and networks (see e.g., Faist &

Ozveren, 2004; White & Ryan, 2008). Such research has grown as global flows of people have intensified, and as interaction between migrants is increasingly facilitated by developments in technology. However, as Ryan, Sales, Tilki & Siara (2008) argue, insufficient attention has been given to examining the different types of networks that exist, or how migrants access existing networks and establish new ties.

In response to these gaps in knowledge, Ryan et al. (2008) examined how migrants used different networks, involving strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1983), to socialise, access employment opportunities and emotional support as well as to learn English. Their work shows how certain networks, particularly those involving others from the same national and ethnic groups can help in specific ways, for example, in settling into an area. However, their work also suggests that close ties and dense networks, particularly among migrants from the same national or ethnic background, may lead to social closure, thus constricting flows of information and limiting opportunities to learn other languages. This is partly as migrants have fewer incentives to develop linguistic competencies, but also because they have fewer opportunities for interaction (Kim, 2001). As several studies have demonstrated, limited language skills force migrant workers into roles that reinforce immobility and offer fewer opportunities to interact with customers or other nationals, which might help to develop their language skills (see Adler & Adler, 1999; McDowell, 2009; Ryan et al., 2008). In the tourism sector, research on migrants' involvement in networks has largely concentrated on accessing employment (Devine, Baum, Hearn, & Devine, 2007a, 2007b; Matthews & Ruhs, 2007; McDowell, Batnitzky & Dyer, 2007). However, as we argue, networks within tourism employment are also a significant learning resource.

Ryan et al. (2008) stress that social networks should be seen to operate across different time scales and spaces, both physical and virtual. Recent research has demonstrated the importance of the internet in the maintenance of networks and in information transactions (Garapich & Osipovic, 2007; Hiller & Franz, 2004; White & Ryan, 2008). Since the 2004 EU Enlargement, a significant number of internet sites aimed at Poles living in the UK have been launched. Apart from sites providing general information about life in the UK (e.g. britaintown.com, networkpl.com, goniec.com), there are sites related to a particular county, district or town. The widening use of the internet by Polish migrants in the UK is reflected in the nine-fold increase (805%) in traffic on Polish language and community websites between January 2006 and January 2008 (Hitwise UK, 2008).

Existing work on networks operating across virtual and physical spaces (e.g. Ryan et al., 2008; White & Ryan, 2008) helps to emphasise the usefulness of adopting a mobilities approach when examining the relationship between migrants' language learning and tourism employment. The data presented in this paper are used to consider how learning operates across multiple environments and influences migration experiences at numerous temporal stages. We illustrate the way information flows from virtual to physical spaces and back again, while considering how interactions between individuals are facilitated and mediated by tourism employment.

2.2 Learning theories and language development among migrants

There are numerous competing theories that have been developed to explain the processes of learning, which focus on cognitive, behavioural and social aspects, but lack of space prevents a lengthy review (see Jarvis, Holford & Griffin (2003) or Schunk (2008) for a more detailed review of key theories). Some theories have attempted to bridge the divide between the three approaches to learning. For example, within social learning theory and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), environment, behaviour, and other such personal factors as cognition have been shown to interact in learning. These theories propose that people learn through observation and the modelling of others' behaviour. Learning can thus be thought of as an ongoing process, operating through relationships and interactions. The learning and adoption of specific norms or behaviours are dependent upon the reinforcement of particular behaviours, which are deemed to be positive among reference groups. Other norms and behaviours that are viewed as inappropriate are abandoned or restricted (Bandura, 1977, 1986). Social learning and social cognitive theory offer an understanding of learning that appreciates its networked nature; however, the psychological aspects of learning are privileged in understanding the adoption of particular behaviours.

An alternative, well-established approach, which moves beyond a narrow focus on either behaviour or cognition, is particularly useful here: this is the experiential learning model proposed by Kolb (1984). Kolb (1984) argued that learning is a process involving *concrete experiences* i.e. engagement in actual activities, *reflective observation*, when people reflect on specific experiences, *abstract conceptualisation*, when individuals draw specific conclusions about experiences, and finally, *active experimentation*, as individuals attempt to apply emerging learned ideas to new contexts. Although Kolb's work has been subjected to debate and criticism (cf. Holman, Pavlica & Thorpe, 1997; Michelson, 1996; Reynolds, 1997), it remains an important theory of learning (cf. Kolb & Kolb, 2005). It is also particularly useful in

understanding the relationship between migrant learning and tourism employment, partly because it helps to appreciate that learning is an ongoing process, operating throughout various stages of migration and utilising alternative competencies; but also, as the data in this paper demonstrates, because it helps to conceptualise the multiple spatial aspects of learning. This is reflected in Kolb's (1984) four dimensions of learning, which operate in and across physical and virtual settings.

The conceptualisation of language learning among sojourners (including migrants) found in the sojourner adjustment literature supports the above theories. Host language learning is commonly theorised as a continuum, in which the first stage consists of largely passive observation. This stage is characterised by uncertainty and vulnerability, as inadequate linguistic competence has an infantilising effect on sojourners. This early stage is preceded by active use of the language, which grows as a function of increased confidence and diminished stress (see Kim, 2001; Liu, 2001). Indeed, according to Gudykunst and Nishida (2001), the acquisition of communicative competence is dependent on the capacity of the sojourner to withstand the stress that is inherent in the cross-cultural encounter. As the sojourner adopts an active approach to language learning, that is, as they engage in verbal communication, stress and anxiety are brought about by the inevitable making of mistakes (Kim, 2001). The reaction to such stress on the part of many sojourners is to limit their use of the host language in a bid to avoid anxiety. Simultaneously, they may consolidate ties with their original country network in order to obtain the succour associated with native language use. This however serves to keep sojourners in an observational and passive role that is associated with the early stage of transition to a new culture (Brown, 2008). Kim (2001) conceptualises sojourner language learning as a dynamic interplay between practice, stress and increased competence: if their capacity to endure stress is robust, sojourners will adopt an increasingly active stance,

and their mastery of the host language will grow. An individual's capacity to withstand stress is viewed as a function of personality, culture and circumstance (Kim 2001). The unique role played by tourism employment in pushing and allowing the migrant worker to acquire linguistic competence will be revealed in this paper.

An important aspect of the experiential learning process is that one or more of Kolb's (1984) four dimensions operate through interactions and networks. Previous work has argued that knowledge is co-created and mediated by relationships (Williams, 2007; Williams & Baláž, 2008). Studies by Lugosi and Bray (2008) and Lundberg and Mossberg (2008) show how staff in different tourism and hospitality settings co-create knowledge, and how experiential learning thus becomes a networked transaction. However, in both these studies, learning is still conceptualised as largely taking place in or around physical work contexts. Returning to the mobilities approach, it is important to consider how learning operates through multiple interactions and embodied experiences, but also through flows of information beyond the workplace, while still being significantly influenced by employment practices and the spaces of work. Moreover, we consider how multiple stakeholders, including colleagues, customers and migrants in various stages of their migration careers, are involved in the process of learning.

2.3 Tourism employment and migrants

A large body of research has examined the nature and characteristics of tourism employment around the world. Perceptions may not entirely match reality; nevertheless, tourism jobs are seen as low-paid, low-skilled, monotonous, highly-pressurised, involving poor working conditions, part-time and seasonal, not family friendly and with poor management and career structures (Nickson, 2007). As a result, such occupations not only make workers, especially

those in front office positions, more prone to stress (Faulkner & Patiar, 1997) but also create the imbalance between work and life (Karatepe & Uludog, 2007; Wong & Ko, 2009).

Migrant workers around the world, often coming from less developed countries, constitute a major part of tourism labour in Western societies. Although some are entrepreneurs who succeed in opening new businesses, many are low-paid migrants, legal or illegal, seeking to develop transferable skills and improve their economic status. Easy access in terms of skills and language requirements, seasonal vacancies and 'turnover culture' make tourism employment accessible. Personal networks and word of mouth also serve as efficient methods for accessing employment. Internet forums and social media act as another source of recruitment and job seeking platforms that may be targeted to a particular audience, for example, migrants from a single nationality (see Janta, 2011).

Regarding motivation for entering tourism, Szivas and Riley (1999) claimed that tourism was a 'refuge sector'; i.e. those who choose tourism employment come from a variety of unconnected set of occupations and possess transferable skills. However, in a replicated study, Szivas, Riley and Airey (2003) revealed that the industry's role as a refuge could apply to the younger sample of the research population only, while Vaugeois and Rollins (2007) did not observe such trends at all. People's motives for entering the tourism industry may therefore vary under different economic or political circumstances. Still, many perceive a career in tourism as a 'stopover' and those who choose the sector treat their occupation as temporary. There is also a view that the most talented will leave the sector for other industries and those who stay do it out of fear of unemployment (Lucas, 2004).

In spite of these negative features of tourism employment, tips, food and accommodation that supplement the basic salary may be considered beneficial (Janta, Ladkin, Brown & Lugosi, 2011). In many countries, employees appreciate working part of the year (i.e. Andriotis & Vaughan, 2004; Lee-Ross, 1999; Lundmark, 2006; Lundtorp, Rassing & Wanhill, 1999). Furthermore, the temporariness of work and movement from one job to another, rather than being seen as negative, become part of a lifestyle choice for a mobile workforce (Duncan, Scott & Baum, 2009).

Lee-Ross and Pryce (2010) also pointed to the paradox within tourism employment that despite the negative conditions and practices, many workers do not report dissatisfaction. High levels of job satisfaction were found in Hawaiian hotels and eating and drinking places (Choy, 1995) as well as in UK pubs (Riley, Lockwood, Powell-Parry & Baker, 1998). A young, communicative and dynamic staff environment may suit many people, and the image of the industry may actually attract some workers (Riley, Ladkin & Szivas, 2002). Thus, despite poor working conditions in the industry, it is suggested that employees become bonded to their work and their work colleagues.

Engaging in tourism work contributes to the creation of 'occupational communities' (Lee-Ross, 1999). In the case of illegal migrants, this aspect of the job has a special meaning: 'work time' becomes synonymous with 'family time' as employees only engage in social relationships at work (Kim, 2009). However, Janta, Brown, Lugosi and Ladkin's (2011) study of migrant workers in the UK revealed that international employees build different relationships and exchange emotional and instrumental support. Some of these relationships develop through the workplace, but extend beyond it, while others develop away from work as a way to help compensate for the negative aspects of tourism employment. Learning, and language

development in particular, is entangled in these relationships and affects migrants' adaptation strategies (Janta, Brown, Lugosi & Ladkin, 2011). The challenge, which the current paper tackles, is to examine the multiple ways in which learning takes place between networks of individuals engaged in tourism employment.

3. Methodology

The wider study on which the paper is based involved three research methods: netnography, interviews and an online questionnaire. The quantitative data gained through the questionnaire provided descriptive insights into migrants' profiles, motivations for entering the sector and various aspects of their employment histories. The qualitative data, obtained from interviews and netnography (investigative research of online interaction), provided greater insights into the nuances and meanings of individual experiences. The qualitative data is used here instead of the quantitative data because it helps to understand the strategies migrants use to develop their linguistic competence. Finally, although so far we have stressed the importance of virtual interactions, extracts are included from both types of qualitative methods, rather than just the netnographic material, in order to provide a broader understanding of the interactions of networked relationships, language development and tourism employment.

3.1 Netnography

This research used a modified form of netnography (Kozinets, 2010) – an investigative, internet-based approach to the study of online communities and cultures which uses postings made to publicly available online forums as data (See Lugosi, Janta & Watson, 2011). In pure

netnography, a researcher's identity and intentions are disclosed and permission is sought from users to study the content of discussions. The method used in this study is 'observational' or 'passive' netnography (Beaven & Laws, 2007) as the research was not disclosed. Langer and Beckham (2005) argue that it is worth contacting members of forums when collecting the data on those sites that are not entirely public (p.194). Thus, obtaining consent for publicly available forums was not deemed necessary (see Ess & The AoIR Ethics Working Committee, 2002; Langer & Beckham, 2005; Madge, 2006). However, the names of participants have been deleted to ensure anonymity.

The most popular sites with the biggest traffic, all written in Polish, were chosen for analysis: *gazeta.pl*, *mojawyspa.pl* (my island) and *ang.pl* (dedicated to those who learn English). For example, *mojawyspa.pl* has 23,000 threads, *ang.pl* has more than 72,000 threads, and the most popular in Poland; *gazeta.pl* has more than 102 million posts written with 7,474 different forums including a forum called: 'Work in Great Britain and Ireland' with 152,000 posts.

As Kozinets (2010) points out, sampling in netnography is purposive, focusing on carefully chosen message threads. Relevant threads were found by examining headings or by using the forums' search engines (See Lugosi et al., 2011). Following Kozinets' (2010) advice, threads that were relevant, active, interactive, substantial, heterogeneous and data-rich were selected for the study. The threads chosen for the research had repeated references to tourism and hospitality jobs and discussed various topics such as experiences of hotel work and particular jobs, for example, a housekeeper, a waiter or a kitchen porter, working conditions and peoples' future work plans. Many of these were chosen for their obvious topics, for example: '*Working in a hotel? Discuss it!*' or '*Why are educated Poles washing pots in the UK??*' on

gazeta.pl. Other titles were less obvious, for example, those discussing migrants' future plans, but these were included if they contained multiple references to tourism and hospitality work.

The threads selected for the analysis were launched between 2004 and 2008 and lasted between a few weeks and/or until 2008. For example, one of the threads used for the study, entitled '*Anyone going to Bournemouth?*', was launched on *ang.pl* in January 2005 and its last post was added in January 2010. The content of this thread was copied to a Word document in its original form and resulted in 30 pages of text and 311 posts, totalling 20,400 words.

3.2 Interviews

The interviews were used for the wider study with the initial aim of identifying the themes that could serve as a basis for the development of the pilot questionnaire (Bryman, 1988, 2008; Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003). Interviews with tourism and hospitality workers were conducted in October 2007. Respondents were approached at the Roman Catholic Church in Bournemouth where a number of events for Poles take place regularly on the church premises. The interviews were conducted with a semi-structured guide. All the interviews took place in public places in Bournemouth such as cafes and hotel receptions and appointments were arranged at convenient times and places for participants.

Six respondents were interviewed initially, which was deemed to be sufficient for this exploratory stage (See Patton, 2002; Kuzel, 1999). The interviews were used to generate indicative themes for the development of the survey, which was the main method of data collection in the overall study. The protocol of interviews (each lasting between 35 and 100 minutes) was designed around four headings, so that during the course of the interview

respondents were asked about their reasons to enter the sector, career paths, adaptation and overall experiences of working in the sector. All the interviews were recorded to improve the accuracy of the data and notes were taken to support the recordings. Each interview was different, depending on the expressiveness of the participant. The initial analysis was done on the Polish transcriptions. The quotes used for the analysis were then translated into English.

3.3 Translating the data

The importance of researchers being the same nationality as a studied group and thereby understanding their culture and past experience has been noted previously by Easterby-Smith and Malina (1999). In addition, Temple and Koterba (2009) argued that Polish migrants' use of language is linked to their identity and lifestyle. Newly arrived migrants in the UK use their language in a different way than those Poles in the UK who belong to older generations. Thus, the researcher's background influences how the translations are approached. A native-speaking, recently migrated Polish researcher working on this study was able to translate and interpret the 'slang', which included humorous references and other culturally-specific concepts.

3.4 Data analysis

The netnographic and interview material were both analysed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) define the term thematic analysis as 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (p. 79). It includes searching for themes across a data set to find repeated patterns of meaning and a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is a flexible approach

and can be used in a way similar to grounded theory where it is data-driven, using an inductive approach, but it can be also driven by the researchers' interests. The guide developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) describe the following steps of using thematic analysis: familiarizing of the researcher with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes and defining and naming themes. These steps were followed in this study.

4. Findings

4.1 Language learning and interactions in virtual networks

The data suggests that migrants began to engage with networks of other migrants during the pre-migration stage. Posts provided information about the relationship between language competency, language development and the role of tourism work. For example, as the post below suggests, tourism employment, with its perceived ease of entry and opportunities for interactions provides opportunities to develop their linguistic skills.

Hello. I am planning to go to England for the summer. I would like to brush up my English and also earn some money. I have realised that the best idea is to get a job as a waiter.
(ang.pl, 25.11.04)

Tourism work and the work spaces themselves appear to offer economic as well instructional anchoring, and it points to the refuge nature of tourism employment (See Szivas & Riley 1999; Szivas, Riley & Airey, 2003). However, it is not clear from such posts whether these employment and learning decisions are necessarily perceived to be bad, although, as the

extract below illustrates, other forum users were more overt in positioning tourism employment and their choices to engage in such work as less preferred options. Posts also suggest that tourism and hospitality employment represents a temporary solution, and that the sector was selected partly to develop language skills but also because the lack of adequate skills during this pre-migration stage limited other opportunities.

At the moment I don't see myself anywhere else, so I will have to work as a waiter. Once I have brushed up my English and got myself orientated I want to work in my profession, as a dentist assistant 😊.

(Mojawyspa.co.uk, 04.03.2007)

These types of comments bring into sharp focus the interaction of language learning and tourism employment in shaping migration experiences. Tourism employment and language attainment positions migrants as low-status workers engaged in low status work. However, as also demonstrated in other studies (cf. Anderson et al., 2006; Eade et al., 2006; Kotic, 2007; Spencer et al., 2007), choosing to work in low-paid sectors provides opportunities to develop linguistic competencies alongside accumulating other forms of capital. This is a temporary situation and Polish migrants may choose to seek alternative employment when their skills have been developed. This highlights the fact that migration is already constructed in the pre-migration stage as a fluid, multi-sited, mobile experience, which is mediated and underpinned by language learning.

Such commentaries also help to understand the ongoing construction of migrants' identities. Contemporary academics stress that transitory lifestyles involve to the emergence of multiple selves and varying levels of affiliations with different places, people and activities (e.g. Duncan

et al., 2009). It is therefore useful to consider the processes through which construction of selves takes place and the role of particular associations/disassociations. Postings about the temporary nature of tourism employment and the eventual return to a 'respectable profession', in this case, dentistry, suggest that well-qualified mobile workers see tourism work and the necessity to learn through such work threatening their identity status, but also that they use such commentary among networks of peers as a form of defence, which helps to reassert both of their sense of selves and their perceived value in global labour markets.

Beyond offering commentary on their expectations during the pre-migration stage, prospective and new migrants also used online forums to mobilise social capital instrumentally. Among the topics discussed on the forums were the level of English needed for a particular job, basic vocabulary at work and questions asked during job interviews. Among many websites, [ang.pl](#) is dedicated to those who learn English, and its users actively exchange queries concerning the level of language needed in tourism related jobs. New and potential migrants describe their problems and others respond with advice and suggestions. For example, a female user with some basic English started a new topic to get help with typical English phrases needed for a job interview: 'Interview – waitress – on Friday help me!!!' ([ang.pl](#), 27.05.2008). As a reply to her query, a message was posted with twenty examples of questions that may be asked during a job interview, such as 'What do you like about waitressing? Are you good at multi-tasking? Are you physically fit? What's the longest amount of time you've spent on your feet? How do you learn new things?'

Those who had already obtained employment in the UK also turned to online users for help. Another female user of [ang.pl](#) asked for help on useful formal and informal vocabulary needed at a job in a bar and restaurant (04.04.2006). Some detailed replies were given by others

suggesting that she may need to use phrases such as: 'What can I get you? What would you like? Can I take your order? Are you ready to order yet?' (05.04.2006). Another user added more: 'I'll be here with you in a minute. Is everything okay so far?' (05.04.2006) and advised further that if there is an empty plate on the table, one can say: 'Are you done with it, please?'

One of the online discussion threads dedicated to learning English, ang.pl, was entitled 'A waiter in England'. New and experienced migrants exchanged advice and reflected on their own adventures with language in the service industry. For example, this post from one of the users was very detailed and includes language related advice to other migrants preparing to engage in tourism work:

[...] It is worth memorising some basic phrases... I can give you some examples...
Hi, would you like a table for 2/3/4...? Maybe this one? Or the one over there?
(you should always suggest a few;) Smoking or non-smoking? Later on we pass a menu. After a while we ask politely: Are you ready to order or shall I come back?
After serving a meal we say to a customer "enjoy your meal" :) and later we need to do a so-called backcheck and we ask: "Is everything ok with the food? Are you ok with drinks?" Obviously with a big smile:) When the customer pays, we need to thank him and when he leaves we need to thank him again, invite him for next time and wish him a good day :) (gazeta.pl, 20.02.2006)

It is also important to stress that beyond practical advice, migrants also used the forums to reflect on their learning and offer broader conclusions about the relationship between language and tourism employment. For example:

I was working in London in the kitchen in a restaurant for 10 months, and I was observing what work looks like from a waiter's perspective. I wouldn't like to be in his shoes, when it gets 'busy' ['busy' written in English], the level of stress is huge, no time to repeat questions about the meal ordered, the level of noise is so great that even if said in Polish you would not understand it. And the customer does not speak like a lector [English native speaker] recorded on a tape. The customer is likely to be from various places across the UK including Wales and Scotland, whose accent is not easy to understand standing face to face.
(gazeta.pl, 24.11.2004)

This type of comment is analogous to Kolb's (1984) notion of reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation. Migrants, drawing on existing social experiences within work spaces, start to create more nuanced conceptions of tourism employment, in this case distinguishing between different types of job roles and the practices they entail. In developing this knowledge and understanding, migrant workers are making (and communicating) future decisions about the ongoing development of their migration careers. This extends to the type of front or back-of-house service work they may pursue in the future and the related strategies for learning the host language.

These exchanges of people at multiple stages of migratory mobility suggest that these online forums were transformed into virtual spaces of learning, where new and experienced migrants could exchange practical advice. Such advice is commonly referred to in the sojourner adjustment literature as instrumental support, which is usually obtained, as in this research, through more experienced members of the same nationality (Triandis, Leung, Villareal and Clack, 1985, Triandis, Bontempo & Villareal, 1988; Hofstede, 2001). These patterns of

instrumental support point to existence of virtual migrant networks that potentially function as quasi-communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). As Wenger (1998) argued, communities of practice involve people who identify with each other and interact because of particular areas of interest, sharing good practice and developing collective bodies of knowledge. Within these virtual forums, migration, mobility, tourism employment and language learning were common points of reference for migrants – underpinning notions of shared identity, informing notions of collective self-interest, driving them to co-create pools of knowledge that enabled them to progress along their migration careers.

Engagement with such virtual communities has symmetric and asymmetric qualities. More specifically, symmetric engagement involves the direct and equal exchange of information which both contributors can utilise. Individual posts contribute to the community's well-being but reciprocity may not come in the form of equivalent information. As we highlighted previously, contributing to these forums may offer a way for individuals to articulate notions of identity or reassert self-worth, which offer psychological rewards. They may be used to establish and develop particular connections; postings may also be seen as investments which may be reciprocated by others in the network or they may be altruistic, thus reifying notions of interdependency and the existence of a 'community'.

4.2 Language learning and interactions in workplace networks

The importance of networks and interactions in developing language skills was also evident in workplaces. Migrant workers were forced to practice what they have learnt and engage in further active experimentation (Kolb, 1984), which, at least for some new migrant employees, was informed by advice gleaned from their existing networks in virtual spaces. However, migrants' narratives suggest that the physical spaces of tourism work offer scope for multiple forms of active experimentation involving different levels of exposure, risk and stress. As the following example illustrates, the hidden, back-spaces of tourism employment were seen as less stressful learning spaces and involving a slower, more passive mode of language attainment which relies on observation rather than participation (Kim, 2001; Liu, 2001):

This job [as a KP] was very useful to me in the situation I was at that time, because I didn't have to speak English, a good command of English wasn't required from me but I could listen. I was learning all the time, but I wasn't responsible for my bad English. I was going to school; I was slowly learning the language. I was also learning from chefs and other KPs and I was trying to take advantage of it as much as I could.

(Artur, ex-hotel worker)

As Kim (2001) suggests, trial and error are natural in transforming personal communication patterns and achieving greater host communication competence. Back and front of house roles both create spaces of knowledge generation where migrants were forced to experiment with language and cultural norms of the host society. However, as Artur (an ex-hotel worker) noted, customer contact roles in service work offer particular learning opportunities: "This experience of working in waiting is priceless. This contact with customers is something you would never learn when working in a factory – doing some physical work." Capitalising on

these learning opportunities also requires workers to shift from passive, observational forms of learning to proactive repertoires: “My English was not on a level that I could chat with a customer. In fact, I did not know any vocabulary, so I took the menu and started learning words such as sausages, scramble eggs, well, everything!” (Artur, ex-hotel worker).

It is important to stress that the development of language was not simply shaped by the active experimentation of individuals; rather, as the following interview extract demonstrates, learning was a collective experience, mediated by others in workers’ social networks.

The fact that I have learnt the language, I mean, I have improved my language, this is due to the hotel for sure, because it was my only job. [...] There was a head waiter who was correcting my English – what I say wrong, how I should say it [...], and I told him: ‘yes, this is exactly what I want you to do for me, keep correcting me!’ And even now, when I speak to some Englishmen, those who I have a good contact with, I say, ‘look, if I say something wrong, please do correct me’.

(Marek, assistant manager)

Such learning within the workplace, through work-based networks, echoes themes highlighted by Lugosi and Bray (2008) and Lundberg and Mossberg (2007); but examining migrants’ posting on internet forums also helped to understand how information flows extended beyond the workplace, engaging wider virtual networks. Migrants also reflected in the forums on the important relationship between tourism employment, the role of active experimentation and concrete experiences and the role of others in mediating their experiences of learning in high-pressure contexts.

I was working behind the bar for 5 months and during the first week I could not understand even a single word they were speaking to me. Before I left I had been thinking that I knew English so well. I had been learning it for so many years, (I passed) A-Level and exams. As someone mentioned earlier – Englishmen speak so unclear, with such a strong accent that sometimes there is no way to understand them. But after a while it gets easier and better, you understand them better and better and later on you speak like they do. And it is true that they are understanding.

(ang.pl, 15.12.04)

These types of posting were offered as a form of emotional support (Ryan et al., 2008) through the social network, which is different from the instrumental support offered by online posts demonstrated earlier. Migrants often discussed their positive and negative experiences of learning through tourism work as a way of helping others cope with difficulties. Again, these commentaries could be read both as evidence of an enacted community among migrants and as attempts by individuals to construct and articulate an evolving self, achieved through the sojourn. Certainly, from a methodological perspective, these kinds of postings help to understand the development of individuals through their migration careers. A key issue to highlight is that such commentaries from migrants also stress the role of others in mediating their learning experiences. For example:

I have been working in a restaurant for 2 months and it has been great. I haven't worked as a waitress before and I was afraid of that, mainly that my English is not brilliant ;) but people are seriously nice (both the girls I work with and

customers). I have never come across a bad reaction, even when they have to repeat the same thing four times. Recently, a customer asked me for some pepper and I misunderstood it as some wine (similar names :) and later on when I brought her some wine instead of pepper, there was lots of laughter! People...I think that the most important thing is to take it easy, not to get stressed out and be able to laugh at our own mistakes [...] (gazeta.pl, 20.08.2006)

Tourism employment forced interaction between the migrants and English speakers and these narratives demonstrate how their learning was mediated through their work. It also demonstrates the ways in which consumers and colleagues play a crucial role in their learning. More importantly, perhaps, reflecting on these experiences, particularly through online forums, added such co-created knowledge to a larger knowledge base that circulates in virtual networks and continues to shape migrant mobilities.

5. Conclusion

This paper has explored the complex interactions between migrant networks, language learning and tourism employment. Migrants' learning emerged through a series of spatial processes, which help to collapse the distinctions between the material and the virtual. Online forums were transformed into virtual spaces of learning, where new and experienced migrants could exchange practical advice and share their migration narratives alongside offering peer support. These spaces were separated from the physical work spaces, but they were also entangled with them as workers applied and experimented with the advice gained from virtual spaces in their tourism employment. Tourism work also forced interaction between migrants

and English speakers; their learning was thus mediated through their work. The concrete experience gained within these physical learning spaces was then reflected upon in the virtual spaces of online forums to add to the co-created learning space.

These spatial processes highlight the fact that migration careers of tourism workers were not solitary processes involving individual trials, adventures or learning experiences; rather they can be read as complex constructions that emerge through and are mediated by tourism employment. Jobseekers and novices look to experienced workers, both prior to the migration experience and while they are involved themselves. Individual knowledge and competence gained through employment is made public and becomes the shared intellectual property of those engaged in the network. The experiences of participants in this study point to the way numerous agencies, including fellow migrants, work colleagues and customers are involved in shaping the learning and socialisation of migrant workers. These examples point to positive experiences of learning, where customers and co-workers are willing to support foreign-born employees, although it is important to recognise that criticisms by customers caused by communicational failures have been reported as well (cf. Devine et al., 2007a; Lyon & Sulcova, 2009).

The emerging themes of this study have a number of implications for researchers concerned with tourism and hospitality organisations and human resource practices. Academics working in the broader areas of organisation studies and management have explored the notion of the networked organisation, which can be understood as operating through complex interactions and relationships within and across institutions (see e.g. Gössling, Oerlemans & Jansen, 2007). Although tourism and hospitality academics recognise that service operations function through the interaction of multiple stakeholders (cf. Davis, Lockwood, Pantelidis & Alcott, 2008;

Ninemeier & Hayes, 2006), these migrant workers' experiences stress the need to avoid viewing specific organisational units as discrete entities, and oversimplifying the inputs, processes and outputs involved in their existence. The data in this paper require academics working in these applied fields to reconceptualise tourism and hospitality organisations as fundamentally mobile, and effectively imagined, entities – operating through complex networks, multiple interactions, and involving flows of information and human capital (see Leander, Philips & Taylor, 2010 for an analogous approach to learning spaces conceptualised within the mobilities paradigm). Employment experiences and the socialisation of migrant workers begin outside the physical boundaries of the workplace, and continue to extend outwards beyond it. This understanding necessitates a more nuanced conceptualisation of human resource practice in tourism and hospitality management research, which appreciates how such networks and flows influence the development of behavioural patterns and even service (sub)cultures, as migrant workers use social media to shape work practices and obtain positions in specific organisations.

Future research on the complexities of tourism and hospitality workplaces will require fieldworkers to broaden the scope of their studies, in terms of defining the “field site”, but also the methods they employ. In this study, migrant workers' connections and the learning related to tourism employment traversed geographical boundaries. Therefore, the extent of their networks redefined the boundaries of their organisational experiences and researchers were thus required to trace these relationships to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences of tourism employment. This sensitivity towards the mobile nature of knowledge generation and the complex networks/networking involved should inform future studies of migrants engaged in tourism work.

Finally, the themes emerging from this research raise several issues concerning mobile methodologies. This study has demonstrated the applicability of netnography and other, dynamic forms of investigative internet-based research (Lugosi et al., 2011), alongside established methods of interviewing, to understanding the relationships between migrant experiences and tourism employment. Virtual environments provide valuable insights into migrant networks and the different forms of personal and instrumental support they provide. Tracing streams of interaction provides information about individual experiences, but also sheds light on how broader networks or communities operate. Internet-based studies provide access to geographically dispersed individuals who may otherwise remain inaccessible. However, it is important for any future research to recognise that these methods can limit interactions between fieldworkers and a research population, thus providing rich but fragmented data sets. Consequently, as this study demonstrates, it is useful, to complement these with more traditional qualitative methods that provide further insights into migrants and how their learning experiences are entangled with tourism employment.

6. Practical considerations

This paper has presented some insights into how Polish migrant workers engage in different networks, both in material and virtual spaces, using different strategies to develop their English skills. The paper has shown how tourism employment is entangled in these relationships and learning processes in numerous ways. These insights have a number of potential implications for practice. Firstly, sensitising employers to the importance of network mediated learning and knowledge co-creation can help them to tap into these resources. It is evident that migrants already use networks to identify employment opportunities; therefore managers can encourage their staff to mediate on their behalf in these networks in

highlighting helpful areas of online discussion, contacting other users, responding to threads or making use of existing information available through these forums.

Secondly, employers can be encouraged to develop a series of soft HRM approaches that make the most out of migrants' learning processes and help to minimise their negative impacts. This may include further sensitisation of employers involved in the recruitment process to pay closer attention to prospective migrant workers' language attainment motivation (LAM) i.e. their desire to engage in experiential learning through work. Understanding a candidate's LAM can help determine where they are located in specific front and back of house roles, which, as indicated earlier, provide different levels of challenge and comfort. Considering LAM may also help to decide who new workers are teamed with and who can provide appropriate levels of support in facilitating experiential learning.

Thirdly, the organisation's culture and the skills levels of existing staff will inevitably help shape the nature of learning within the workplace. Lugosi and Bray's (2008) study points to the advantages of developing a culture in which mutually supported learning among co-workers is actively encouraged. As a precursor, it may be useful to provide workers with a fundamental grounding in the principles of learning and with a series of simple techniques that encourage reflection among staff. This would augment the solutions proposed by Devine et al. (2007a) who suggested a series of work-based approaches that employers can adopt in helping their staff to integrate, learn English and become more effective employees. The instilment of experiential learning within such initiatives can then be rewarded at the level of the individual employee, through various extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, but also at the level of the organisation through recognised accreditation schemes such as those being offered in the UK by the Institute of Hospitality.

Fourthly, augmenting workers' work-based learning experiences with support for formal learning programme provided by accredited language schools would also be an option for employers. Although the likelihood of migrant mobility, short-term commitment of employees and the costs would make the funding of a formal language course prohibitive for most employers, language schools can be encouraged to offer discounted rates for workers of particular companies, in return for which employers could promote the school's services. Such co-marketing could offer relatively low-cost gains for both sets of stakeholders. At the time of writing, the UK government launched an initiative to provide training for economic migrants to improve their socio-cultural adjustment, and this includes language and cultural learning courses. Therefore, in many cases, the cost of organising such support could be removed from the employer.

A fifth implication concerns the level of intervention and the agencies involved. This study has shown that learning takes place beyond the workplace; and consequently, the involvement of a broader set of stakeholders at the national level should be encouraged. This includes academic researchers, who can engage in these networks and identify the role of virtual spaces for learning, but also governmental agencies and professional bodies such as the Institute of Hospitality in the UK, who may provide funding and expertise for the development of online resources aimed at potential migrant workers. These resources may take the form of guides or formal skills development packages, but may also include informal initiatives such as the employment on a casual basis of individuals who can monitor, report on and, if possible, contribute to these learning spaces.

Finally, it is important to highlight that this study has implications beyond tourism and hospitality management. It is clear that migration and employment are politically sensitive topics, particularly as the current economic climate has impacted on the opportunities available to international and domestic workers. Consequently, understanding the relationship between tourism and hospitality employment and migrant experiences can inform policy debates about the role of this sector in social exclusion and inclusion. This can then be used to inform policy decisions about the interventions that authorities may use to encourage or discourage particular migration patterns, but also interventions that help to facilitate the integration of migrants into society.

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