

THE FLYING DUTCH JOB. JOBS THAT MIGRATE FROM THE NETHERLANDS TO ROMANIA

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Abstract. In the present article I discuss the migration of work from the West towards the East, making direct references to this kind of work relocation between the Netherlands and Romania. More specifically, this article focuses on the Dutch language based activities relocated or outsourced to Romania, a situation which puts customers in contact with “brains without bodies” or “invisible work-migrants”. In order to highlight the trend of migrating jobs I take a look at the evolution of job advertisements for Dutch speakers in Romania. Then, I investigate the impact that the international relocation of back-office and front-office business activities has both on the employees who take over the activity and on the customer’s satisfaction. Factors such as linguistic similarity, cultural practices, and attitudes towards customers’ complaints shape the outcomes of such relocations. Given that the otherness between employees and customers can be faster noticed in the direct, “voice-to-voice” interaction, the situation of call-centres deserves special attention for the analysis. Call-centres clearly feature the characteristics of non-places, where the employee must assume a similar identity to that of the customer.

Keywords: migration, work, Dutch, culture, language

Introduction

The presence of work migrants in Western countries captured public attention and raised many debates, both in the mass media and the online social environment, in the context of economic crisis and widespread job shortage. The Dutch media frequently discussed about the ending of work restrictions on the local job market for Romanian and Bulgarian citizen starting with 2014. During these discussions, concerns were often expressed about the expected new wave of Eastern European work migrants (from Romania and Bulgaria) towards the West. These discussions took place on the background of the 2013 Dutch public agenda’s

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primary concern with the cohabitation (*het samenleven* in Dutch), as this remained the most important problem in the view of the Dutch public (Dekker and Possumus, 2013).

The purpose of this article is to reveal a more complex picture, one that entails a less visible, yet undoubtedly connected trend: the job migration from the West towards the East, based on business decisions and cost analysis of large companies, a process which puts “brains without bodies” in contact. At the present moment, such a trend can be clearly depicted in Romania, where more and more foreign companies relocate business activities, thanks to the cheaper qualified work force that can be employed here for serving distantly located foreign populations by means of computer mediated communication.

Both individual labour migration and job migration based on business decisions can be linked to the phenomenon of globalization, although at different levels. As Jessop (2005) notes, “globalization” is a chaotic concept and “globalisation is generally better interpreted as the complex resultant of many different processes than as a distinctive causal process in its own right” (Jessop, 2005:17). The heightened capital mobility and the internationalization of production have also facilitated the international mobility of labour (Sassen, 1988). In the present day economy, job opportunities are seen to be less tied to space and time (Sweet and Meiksins, 2013) following the radical transformation of these two fundamental dimensions of human life determined by the new communication systems (Castells, 2000). As such, after the migration of manufacturing work towards the East, where manual labour is cheaper, the migration of service sector work can also be seen:

Service activities have been fostered by the growth of skilled workforces overseas and by the rapidly decreasing cost of information technology and communicating over the Internet, just as the offshoring of manufactured goods was fostered by low-cost offshore manufacturing and decreases in transportation costs (Gomez et al., 2013: 149).

The subject of outsourcing and of job relocation is of course not new and the reason for which companies undertake such activities is quite straightforward: cost savings. The same activity can be differently remunerated depending on the location of the employee performing it. This is why the increased presence of American multinational corporations in Europe and Asia, for example, set up a new trend of multi-locational production as “beyond the actual movement of people across borders, there is growing interconnection between workers in the country they work and the rest of the world, through global flows of production, money (remittances) information and culture” (Castells, 2000:131). This labour interdependence is exemplified by Castells with the cases of Bombay and Bangalore, two cities that have become major subcontractors of software for companies

around the globe, due to the use of thousands of highly skilled Indian engineers and computer scientists who receive only 20% of the remuneration paid in the US for a similar job (Castells, 2000).

Similarly, in Romania Dutch speakers working in relocated activities are better paid than the country's average wage, but still they have a substantially lower salary than their native speaker equivalent found in the Netherlands or Belgium. German is another foreign language in demand at the moment in the service sector and German speakers can also demand a salary higher than the national average. Very often service sector jobs in multinational organizations require a combination of competences that include English and another foreign language. Because the offer for English speakers is high (higher than that for German or Dutch speakers) employers can conduct a much more thorough selection of English speaking candidates.

Case study: demand for Dutch speakers

In order to give a clearer picture of the “migrating jobs” trend, I looked at the demand for Dutch speakers on the Romanian job market, based on the number of advertised jobs. The starting point for this article consist therefore of a quantitative analysis of the job advertisements for Dutch speakers on two large and popular job advertising websites from Romania. On these two websites I searched for all job postings containing the English word “Dutch” in the title. I eliminated from the results the duplicated posts (the same job advertisement placed more than once in the same month). I didn't include the search results that only had the Romanian equivalents of the word “Dutch”, meaning “olandeză” and “neerlandeză”, as these were quite few and the jobs advertised with these Romanian words in the title had a different character, detailed below. However, some of the jobs in the service sector that contain the English word “Dutch” in the title also include the Romanian word “olandeză”. I did not take into account the number of opened positions included in one job offer. In other words, I equalled one advertisement with one open position/job, even though some advertisements mentioned more than one opening.

In Figure 1 the evolution of the job advertisements for the time period January 2012 - March 2015 can be seen, based on the data gathered from the first advertising website. For this 39 months period the total number of advertised jobs for Dutch speakers was 211, and a constant offer of jobs for Dutch speakers can be observed, with a moderate increase in the last months.

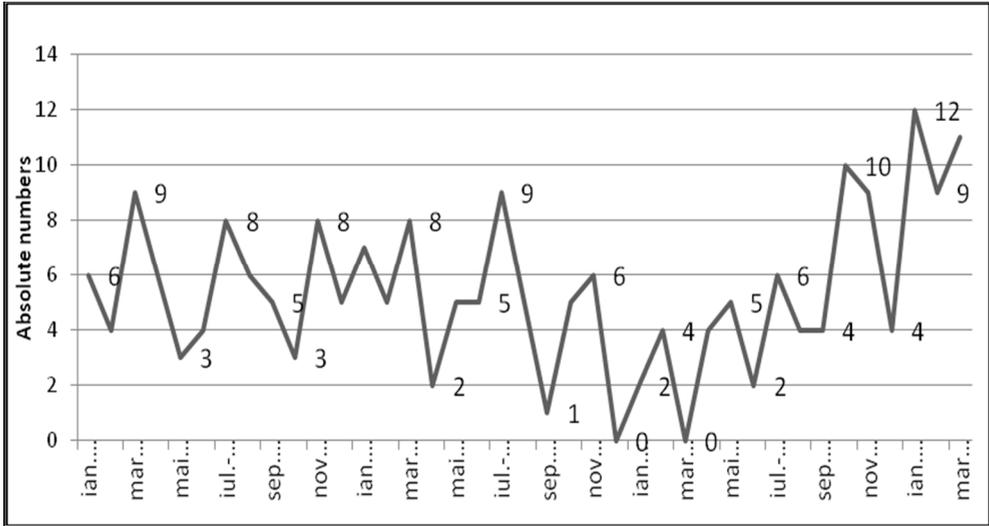


Figure 1. Evolution of job advertisements between January 2012 and March 2015. Data collected from the 1st job advertising website²

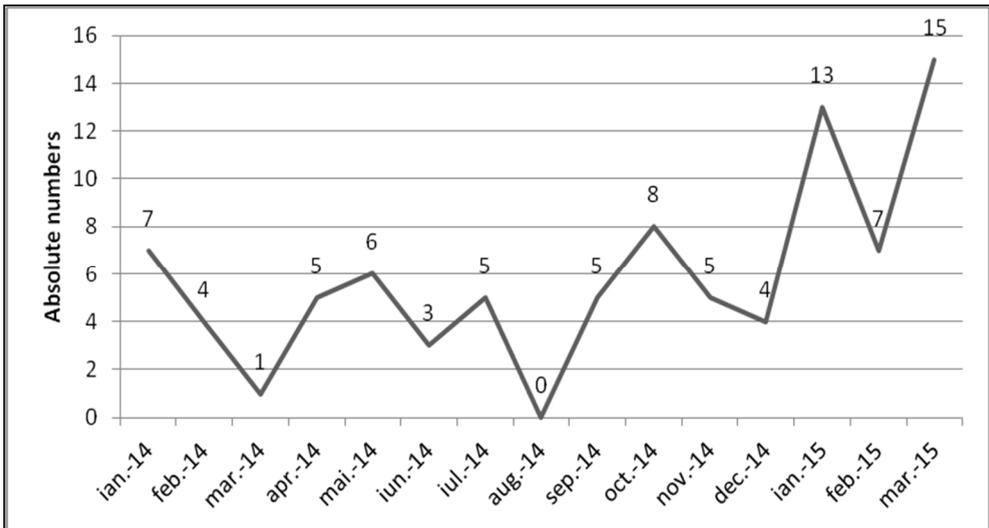


Figure 2. Evolution of job advertisements between January 2014 and March 2015. Data collected from the 2nd job advertising website

² Upon request, the names of the websites can be provided by the author to interested individuals.

A similar trend can also be observed in Figure 2, based on data gathered from the second job advertising website investigated, which only offers an archive with the advertised jobs for the previous and the current year (meaning 2014 and 2015). The total number of advertised jobs for Dutch speakers for this 15 months period was 88. A general decrease of the number of advertised jobs can be observed in both figures in the summer and winter months, with the sharpest decrease around the months of August and December, but this could be considered a general trend in job advertising as these periods coincide with vacations and holidays.

Even if at present the absolute number remains small, a steady increase in the job offers can be depicted in both figures. On both websites, most of the jobs can be included in the general category of “Customer Care Services” but the range of job offers based on the knowledge of the Dutch language is quite diverse and includes the following: IT help desks for both B2B (business to business) and B2C (business to customer) regarding hardware & software support, simple accountancy for B2B or B2C or other finance related activities, human resources related activities, GPS (global positioning system) live assistance for the automobile industry, database administration or data analysis, different kinds of web-content support or administration, online gaming and gambling assistance – either for social media applications or online casinos. Another smaller category on the two websites is that of jobs for Dutch speaking engineers. The jobs in the B2B category can be seen as „producer services” Sassen (1991), meaning specialized services dedicated to corporations and meant to further facilitate productive and commercial activity. What we are thus seeing is “an increasingly service-intensive mode of production” (Sassen, 1991:95).

As a result of the increasing demand for Dutch speakers, advertisements from private language schools seeking to employ Dutch language teachers also appear periodically on the job advertising websites, although considerably less frequent than the previously mentioned job categories. Another advertised job type is that of the Dutch speaking tourist guide. These two last mentioned types of jobs are usually advertised in Romanian. Another interesting remark is that jobs physically placed in other Eastern European countries are advertised in Romania. Some of the advertised jobs were not located in Romania, but in countries such as Hungary, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Poland. The fact that Dutch-speaking Romanians were invited to work in other Eastern European countries indicates that Romanian work force pool of Dutch speaking persons is considered productive and available for spatial mobility. It also shows that at the national level, neighbouring job markets and transnational corporations are in competition with each other for attracting scarce resources, in this case relatively cheap(er) Dutch speaking employees. As Jessop (2005) also notes, in the global job market,

local job markets (at regional/ national levels) enter into competition with each other even if they are thousands of miles apart.

The advertisements on these two Romanian websites do not give the full picture of the job market for Dutch speakers located in Romania. A Dutch speaker who places his or her CV on job advertising websites or on professional social networks will often be directly contacted by recruiters or by so called “headhunters” offering new job opportunities. In this case, previous experience in the service sector based on Dutch language competences makes for an even more attractive future employee. Also, some companies choose to place job advertisements only on their own websites, based on the idea that only the individuals who truly wish to work at that company will periodically check that website. Many jobs are also advertised through alumni online networks of former students of foreign languages.

Based on the above presented facts, it can be said that the demand for Dutch speakers in Romania is greater than the offer (the actual number of people who speak Dutch). These advertisements could be correlated with the reports of the National Bank of Romania (2013 & 2014), which show that the Netherlands is the largest foreign investor in Romania, with a share of the net foreign investments of 30.8% in 2012 and of 29.7% in 2013. However, the jobs mentioned above are not predominantly placed in Dutch companies who decided to expand or move their activity to Romania, but rather in other (non-Dutch) multinational companies, who provide services for the Dutch speaking population of the Netherlands and of Belgium.

How did this situation come to be? The wide use of IT&C plays a significant role, as jobs from the service sector are more easily displaced to cost saving locations such as Eastern Europe and Asia. A continuous exchange is thus conducted between countries offering cheap(er) work force and companies looking to increase their profits by reducing costs, companies that most of the time have their headquarters located in the developed, wealthy economies, where wages are high. The relatively cheap qualified work force found in Romania, together with other factors presented in the following, led to the rapid development of the outsourced services sector.

The migration of jobs

Jobs migrate over country borders when a company decides to relocate or outsource to an international destination. Relocation and outsourcing are two solutions that companies use in order to lower costs. Relocation of an activity means that it is conducted in-house, within the company, but in another subsidiary

of that company, placed in a more cost effective location than the location of the headquarters. An activity can be either outsourced (placed outside of the borders of the company), it can be relocated to another country but still be kept in-house, or it can be both outsourced and relocated (moved to another organization and another country). International relocation of tasks and processes is sometimes cheaper than the use of local work force and the costs of relocation are amortized in time. For a multinational company it can be cheaper to centralise an activity in a single geographic low-cost location than to have a team doing the same activity in each country where it has a branch. A low cost location means lower wages, lower prices for renting or buying office space, lower taxes etc. The costs that the company has for producing a certain product or service would also be seen in the price of the product or of the service that the end user/customer has to pay. Again, Romania is seen as a good location to outsource based on the above mentioned aspects: lower wage levels for a highly skilled work force, lower rental or buying prices for office space, fast internet connection.

Attitudes towards work conflicts and the degree of labour unionization found in a certain country are also important factors taken into consideration by organizations deciding to outsource or relocate to a certain location. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are seen as having a relatively low frequency of strikes and of other manifestations of societal discontent (Bernaciak, 2015). As part of this region, Romania also has a low degree of work conflicts (strikes and other forms of protests) and also a very low degree of unionization (trade union membership) in the private service sector in particular. This trend was also influenced by the fact that the formation of trade unions became very difficult after the 2011 Labour Code. According to the *Benchmarking Working Europe* (2015) report of the European Trade Union Institute, collective bargaining coverage decreased in Romania with 47% between 2000 and 2012. The new Labour Code introduced in 2011 also made the processes of hiring and firing easier, introduced longer probation periods and extended the duration of fixed-term contracts and limited the right to strike (Bernaciak, 2015). These factors also contribute to the “attractiveness” of Romanian workforce in the eyes of transnational capital.

In the following sections I will focus on the relocated activities in the service sector performed in organizational structures placed in Romania, thus either outsourced to third parties or relocated to a branch in Romania but kept in-house, inside the large organization. This situation puts individuals from different countries in contact with “invisible work-migrants”. To clarify the discussion that follows, a few words are first needed on what makes the services sector. There have been several debates about the definition of the

“services sector”, first of all due to the fact that this sector has more often been defined based on what it is not rather than on what it is, and secondly because in the new information society it is even more difficult to distinguish the boundaries between goods and services (Castells, 2000). Several types of jobs in the service sector can migrate under the form of outsourced or offshored activities:

Under Business Process Outsourcing, whole work processes can be moved offshore as often occurs with ‘back-office’ functions such as human resources, finance and accounting. ‘Front-office’ functions that used to involve ‘face-to-face’ interactions have been supplanted by call centers that now deal with customers on a ‘voice-to-voice’ basis (Gomez et al., 2013: 149).

Both back-office and front-office activities can be outsourced and/or relocated. The activities conducted in call centres are “front-office” activities, the front line of a company’s interaction with its outside customers. As I have shown in previous section, the jobs advertised for Dutch speakers in Romania include both back-office activities (such as accounting, finance, human resources etc.) but also front-office activities (such as customer service activities that take place in call or contact centres). The international relocation of front-office activities can have a higher impact on customer satisfaction than the relocation of back-office activities, given that *otherness* becomes more obvious in this direct, “voice-to-voice” interaction. The activities developed in call centres are themselves so diverse that they have led to multiple views in the academic literature. Frenkel et al. (1999 apud. Taylor et al., 2002) for example, place the “front line” work activity developed in call centres under the larger umbrella of “knowledge work”. This study also pointed out that call centres employees don’t necessarily fit the profile of the prisoners of technology, meaning that the computer applications do not entirely control the actions of the workers. Castells (2000), on the other hand, believes that not all business services (call centre services included) are knowledge intensive, large part being computer-data processing jobs and some service-occupations being mostly semi-skilled. As Taylor et al. (2002) show, some use a quantitative evaluation of results, while others use a qualitative evaluation, depending also on the nature of tasks. To summarize, the mix between standardization and knowledge-intensive tasks can be quite diverse from one call centre to another.

If the horizontally structured global corporation is organized around process, measures performance based on customer satisfaction and rewards its employees based on team performance (Castells, 2000), the questions that the company has to answer before deciding to outsource are: “Would a client pay more for the help of a native speaker?” and “What would be the impact of

an activity performed by a non-native on customer satisfaction?”. The company must evaluate both the level of service quality in a certain location and the costs of relocation in that location. A company would also have to estimate the time it would take for a process to reach its pick performance after it was outsourced and/or relocated. The transfer of knowledge would most likely go from top to the bottom: first the higher managerial roles are instructed and then the lower, execution roles, but time will be needed to reach the previous quality level. In the following, I will turn to two other factors that firms employing service workers should take into account when deciding whether or not to relocate an activity, and, if so, to which location, namely linguistic similarity and cultural practices.

Foreign language knowledge

The level of knowledge of a certain language is the key element in the hiring process in an outsourced or relocated activity. As Taylor et al. (2002) show, some call-centres have more quality based workflows, while others have more quantity based ones. The quality and quantity workflows are not to be seen as a dichotomy but rather as a continuum, meaning that each call centre presents a combination of both dimensions. It can be assumed that the level of knowledge of the foreign language must be higher in the more quality oriented call centre activity, as interaction with the customer is spontaneous due to low(er) task standardization. Standardization of tasks would lead to following a script when interacting with the customer. Strict transcript adherence can require a good pronunciation and a rather limited vocabulary while a flexible transcript or a lack thereof requires a rich vocabulary. The difference between front-end and back-end activities must be kept in mind when speaking about the visibility of otherness in the employee - client interaction. If in the case of back-office activities the possibility of perceiving the otherness of the employee is small, in the front-office type activities this possibility is high. The Dutch language based jobs mentioned in the first section of this article which were advertised on the Romanian employment websites can be divided into these two categories: back-office type jobs (in accountancy, human resources – primary selection, and some of the web content support activities) and front-office type jobs (all direct client-interaction related jobs).

Many outsourced and offshore activities are performed in the form of multi-language teams, meaning that the same activity is performed in several languages, serving more countries. This can be observed from the headlines of job advertisements from the two investigated job advertising websites, as the

titles contain several languages (for example: “*Credit & Collections Analyst – French/ German/ Polish/ Russian/ Dutch/ Italian/ Serbian*” or “*Call Centre Representative with one of the following languages: Hungarian, Italian, Portuguese, French, Finnish, Swedish, Danish, Dutch, Japanese, German, Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian and English*”). What would the activity in such a team look like? For example, a team of 50 persons performing an offshore activity can serve 5 countries, therefore creating 5 language based sub-teams. The distance between the language and the culture of a certain employee and the language and the culture of the country he or she is serving can differ between the 5 sub-teams.

When speaking about the time needed for the acquisition of a foreign language by a non-native speaker, there is no generally accepted method for the measurement of the distance between different languages that could predict it. However, some of the often used characteristics to make such differentiations between languages are the family tree and the grammar structure of a language. Individual (socioeconomic, demographic) characteristics also influence the time and level of acquisition of a foreign language by a non-native speaker (Barry and Miller, 2005). Coming back to the question “What would be the impact of an activity performed by a non-native speaker on client satisfaction?” certain differentiations have to be made between the language abilities of non-native speakers. Languages differ from each other in terms of grammar structure, among other aspects. For a person who has a synthetic mother tongue it could be more difficult to learn an analytic language than to learn a synthetic one. Pronunciation is another problem that could immediately differentiate a native speaker from a non-native, as for example the Dutch language has specific sounds not found in the Romanian language and the other way around. In regards to the Dutch language, a non-native speaker would also have to replicate and /or understand both the pronunciation of the Dutch spoken in the Netherlands and that of the Dutch spoken in Flanders, Belgium. Therefore, the answer to the previously stated question, regarding the impact of an activity performed by a non-native speaker on client satisfaction depends on each case, based on the distance between the mother tongue of the speaker and the foreign language s/he uses at work, and the previous experience of that person with that specific foreign language.

Differences in cultural practices

Another aspect that could influence the quality of services offered in an outsourced or relocated format is the difference in cultural practices. The difference and distance between cultures can be theorized in more ways than

one, using for example the framework of Geert Hofstede (2001), Inglehart & Welzel (2010) or Edward Hall (1990) etc. These approaches received their share of critiques from the scholarly world, as up to this day it remains problematic to convincingly draw conclusions based on analyses that make inferences from the macro level to the micro one or the other way around. When speaking about cultural differences, dangers such as the ecological fallacy or overgeneralization must always be kept in mind.

Individuals from different cultures are also likely to resemble each other based on similar social class, generation, education, social status, religion, ethnicity etc. Many workers in the service sector are young and have a high level of education (as obviously they speak one or more foreign languages). Young Dutch language speakers from Romania enjoy also a higher than average salary, due to the scarcity of Dutch language speakers compared with the market demand. They can thus afford a cosmopolitan lifestyle that does not differ significantly from English or Dutch young adults from abroad. Still, there are differences in cultural practices that should be considered when talking about outsourcing or relocating business activities. Such cultural practices include the style of communication - difference in the level of formality/informality in written or verbal communication, the strict following versus the occasional bending of the rules and procedures, the speed of response (if not set through company policies), and even less obvious things, such as a certain sense of humour. Differences are also reflected in practices such as the strictness in filling in the forms, the need of a company stamp on the forms, the formal proof for claims and statements such as order dates, complaint reasons etc. which seem “normal” (taken for granted) for Romanian employees, while for Dutch employees might seem as “overdoing it”, or even possibly offensive, as they involve mistrusting one’s client/partner.

Another cultural difference that must be taken into consideration in the phenomenon of jobs migrating from the Netherlands towards Romania is the different approach towards expressing dissatisfaction, and complaining. The Dutch public is used and encouraged to express dissatisfaction in regard with the received services by registering a complaint. There are specialized Dutch websites in addressing and solving complaints from customers regarding various companies and services. Many companies offering goods or services to the general Dutch public as well as many public institutions have a “complaints” (“*klacht*” in Dutch) section on their website. The complaint section is often clearly visible on the homepage of the website. As a rule, the way of addressing is pleasing, most of the time formal (using the Dutch polite pronoun “U”) on the websites of the public institutions and mostly familiar on the websites of private companies. Such examples are: “Are you not satisfied with our services? We

would gladly like to know it” (website of a public institution), “Have we not fully met your expectations? Then let us know it!” (website of a private company in the service sector).

There are also numerous dedicated Dutch websites for learning how to write a complaint, some even dedicated to pupils or students. Having personally followed a bachelor degree in Dutch language and literature in Romania, I too had to learn how to write such a complaint for a class assignment³. I remember being quite intrigued at that time about one of the recommended closing formulas for such a complaint, namely “*Met vriendelijke groeten*”. This generally translates into English as “*With kind regards*” but it contains the adjective “vriendelijk(e)” meaning “friendly” which comes from the Dutch noun “*vriend*” (friend) and the adjective specific ending “*lijk(e)*”. To my mind a complaint suggested a conflict situation and using the word “friendly” in such a context seemed inappropriate. But as my native Dutch teacher explained to me at the time, there is nothing contradictory about it. Some websites describing ways of writing complaints mention, however, that this mode of closing a complaint should be avoided when the claimed damage or loss is grave. This personal example shows that an insufficient knowledge of the nuances of a foreign language and of foreign cultural practices could lead to misinterpretations and miscommunication.

The question is: would this difference influence the approach of a non-native Dutch speaker employee in dealing with a complaint in an outsourced activity? Would the novelty of dealing with complaints on a regular basis give a sense of urgency or a sense of detachment to the fulfilling of the task? In this case also, company regulations could compensate for differences in perspectives, by means of strict implementation of process regulations, rules and timelines. However, the impact of the difference between the employee and the customer in regard to customers’ complaints, in the context of relocated or outsourced activities must be further researched.

Given the fact that some outsourced or relocated activities are rather language-based than country-based, the cultural navigation skills of an employee working in such a position can be quite difficult to attain. For example, a service based on the French language could be offered at the same time by the same employee to customers from France, Switzerland and Belgium, countries that might differ in terms of cultural practices. Romanian employees (to keep in line with the original scenario) from such a team would therefore first have to be aware of these differences and afterwards adapt their patterns of communication

³The presented remarks about Dutch language and culture come also from personal experience gained by completing a bachelor degree in Dutch language and literature and by numerous trips made in the past 10 years to the Netherlands for both personal and research reasons.

or behaviour to the assumed expectations of a client belonging to a specific cultural milieu. Making invisible one's own linguistic background and cultural milieu is not an easy task as such, but service workers are requested to additionally "migrate" to different linguistic and cultural contexts and act as if those were their own.

Who are the "invisible work-migrants"?

In the introductory section of this article I mentioned the fact that the Dutch mass media is concerned about the many East European labour migrants who are thought to plan to come to the Netherlands. But who are the "invisible work-migrants", the non-native speakers with whom individuals from other countries come into contact with when accessing certain services? I use the phrase "invisible work-migrants" in respect to the individuals who take up the jobs that migrated from the Netherlands to Romania and who, by means of virtual communication, come into contact with the Dutch speaking population of the Netherlands and of Belgium while offering their services. They are not seen in the country(s) they offer services for, but the effect of their work is felt in numerous sectors in that same country, as shown by the diversity of job offers presented in the case study.

The jobs relocated to Romania, most of which are found within the borders of large corporations, have led to the appearance in the public's perspective of a new type of worker: the corporate worker. The people working in this relocated service delivery sector are the ones Castells calls "the networked – workers who are online but without deciding when, how, why, or with whom" (Castells, 2000: 260). But there are two categories here: the local work force and the native speakers who migrate together with the job, or afterwards for it.

The Romanian non-native Dutch speaker (our protagonist) would have had to make a previous additional effort of learning this foreign language, most of the time in the educational system, therefore leading to a higher educational level. It is obvious that the person obtaining a certain job based only on the knowledge of a foreign language would not be in direct competition with the possible native speaker equivalent. In other words, a Romanian employee would receive an outsourced job based on his knowledge of the Dutch language because he can perform that activity from Romania, where he would receive a smaller salary than his native counterpart in the Netherlands or in Belgium. If he would want to perform that activity in the Netherlands, he would be in direct competition with a native Dutch speaker, and, in addition, the employer would

be forced to pay a minimum salary at the level from Netherlands.⁴ Moving the job from the Netherlands (where language competence is abundant, but relatively costly) to Romanian (where it is scarce, but relatively cheap) has both advantages and disadvantages for the company. The main gain seems to be hiring at a lower cost a better-educated, fluent but non-native Dutch speaker. The main risk is that language competence might be lower than required by the business, and found unsatisfactory by the native speaker end-client/customer.

Based on living costs, a native speaker would have to receive a higher salary in his home (Western) country, even if he had a lower level of education than the employee performing the same activity under its outsourced/offshore form in another (non-Western) country. A possible scenario for an organization would be therefore to convince native speakers to relocate for a time to a non-Western country in order to perform an activity based on his/her native language, leading to the so-called “expats”. Because large Romanian cities such as Bucharest, Cluj and Timișoara have become hubs of outsourced activities serving several Western countries, some of the above mentioned jobs from the advertising websites are also performed by native Dutch speakers (expats) who decided to move to Romania for a job offering. This decision can be based on an individual cost analysis, as the disposable income for expats, after paying taxes, housing and utilities, might be higher in real terms than in the Netherlands, consequently the standard of living can be better for them in Romania than in their home country.

Coming back to the Romanian work force, it must be said that there are not many statistical studies about the characteristics and attitudes of Romanian employees in general. One of these few studies is that of Bodea (2013), called “The values of Romanian employees”. The main criticism of Bodea’s study remains the choice of his 1,481 participants, as his sample is opportunistic and only representative for Romanian employees from the urban areas, who are between 20 and 50 years old, who have a university degree and who come from the three major historical areas of Romania. Still, I consider that the study of Bodea can be seen as representative for the population engaged in outsourced or relocated services, and therefore for the present article. Bodea asked his respondents to say what values are most important to them, from a given list, and then to say in what measure they consider that those values are important for the other Romanians. The study confronts the answers to the question “What are your values?” with the answers to the question “What are the values of other

⁴ An observation here is the fact that it should not automatically be assumed that a non-native Dutch speaker working in the service sector is always located outside the Netherlands or of Belgium or that all employees found in the Netherlands or Belgium in this sector are Dutch native speakers.

Romanians?”. The *ideal* values are the most desirable values that respondents reportedly display: honesty, confidentiality, excellence and work persistence. The most important values of *the other* Romanians are money, power and fame (Bodea, 2013). Thus, there is an obvious discrepancy between what respondents report to value themselves and what they consider that others value. The results of the study show that the self is perceived as valuing hard work and the relation with others, while the others are seen as egocentric and oriented towards self-interest (power, authority and material gain). This difference is explained by the author based on the fact that people do not feel comfortable admitting to others that power and financial gain is what drives them in life (Bodea, 2013).

A connection can be made between the results of this study and the desirability of outsourced jobs in multinational companies. These are highly desirable based on the higher wage levels compared to other smaller or state-owned companies, and also offering better working conditions in terms of office equipment and facilities. They also provide in-kind benefits such as private health-care insurance, access to private gyms, day-care for employee’s children etc. This is also why working for a multinational company can influence the chances of migration in both ways. To paraphrase Ferro (2009), it can either create the conditions for migrating [to another branch of the company found abroad] but it can also be a retention mechanism if those specific working conditions surpass the general working conditions [from Romania in this case].

Brains without bodies and non-places

In the new information society “anyone with the capacity to generate exceptional added value in any market enjoys the chance to shop around the globe and to be shopped around as well” (Castells, 2000: 130). This type of outsourced activity is sometimes called “brains without bodies”, given that “the products of those brains that work at a distance arrive via the internet directly in the IT business centre from abroad, which makes up a form of virtual mobility of the work force” (Ferro, 2009: 222).

We could thus talk about the invisible migration of work: the jobs that migrate from the West towards the East. But what is the status of those working for a certain country but who do not live there, of these “brains without bodies”? Their physical presence remains invisible in the country they work for, but their actions are felt by the people living in that country, who enjoy a certain service. They are in fact a sort of a ghostly presence and I believe it would not be hazardous to say that the call centre which they are working for

presents some of the characteristics of what Marc Auge (1995) called a “non-place”. The typical examples of a non-place are hotels, train stations or airports. They are a place of anonymity, of transit and of non-time. It would be interesting to research to what extent a company with a strong organizational culture still encloses characteristics of a non-place in its call centre type departments, to see how employees in large numbers of standardized cubicles adapt their performances to the client at the other end of the line. The psychological effects of assuming this different identity during the work day should further be researched.

In regards to the perceived visibility of otherness of the ones performing some form of outsourced activity, it has been previously brought to the attention of the Dutch public that part of the low priced (clothing) goods sold in the Netherlands and manufactured in Asia was connected to the exploitative working and living conditions of the people manufacturing these goods. If the manufacturing conditions and the striking otherness of manufacturer workers remain usually out of sight, unperceived by customers, in the call centre type activities from the service sector the *otherness* of workers becomes evident, most easily through their accents. When someone contacts a call-centre or a help desk for a certain service he or she will most of the time notice if the person at the other end of the line is a native speaker or not.

In order to hide this *otherness* some companies forbid their employees to tell clients where they are placed, even when directly asked by the client during the conversation. Other companies forbid their employees by written agreement to tell anyone outside of the company what foreign (organizational) clients they offer services for. Another company forbids its employees to speak in their native language while they are sitting at their desks and lets them use only English when using the personal phone, because they could be heard by the clients their colleagues are speaking with at the same time. All these acts are a way of hiding workers’ own identity (when different from that of the client) and of putting on a face. A popular example of performing the role of “neighbouring service provider” is shown in the call centre scene from the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). Here, the main character, when confronted about his location by the client on the phone, makes efforts to convince the client of his proximity (and implicit similarity) to her. Closeness and resemblance to the clients served are a desideratum for companies outsourcing or relocating services. This is also due to the perception of the loss of jobs on the national market due to externalization of services which leads to negative reactions from the local general public regarding a service performed by an “outsider”.

The invisible workers of outsourced and relocated activities also have job-requirements such as working in shifts in order to compensate for time differences, having to give up a free holiday in their own culture as this is not

a holiday in the serviced country, living in a cultural environment during their 8 hour work day (speaking a certain language, using a certain tone etc.) and entering a (very) different milieu outside of the working hours.

Conclusions

The new information technology has redefined work processes, workers and the occupational structure of different societies (Castells, 2000) and multinational companies are often seen as the motor of the globalization process. The full impact of jobs migration to Romania, as part of this trend, has not yet been thoroughly researched. At the present moment the demand for Dutch speakers is greater than the offer (the actual number of people who speak Dutch). Higher wages are offered for competences hard to come by (such as the knowledge of the Dutch language now is). A Dutch language fresh graduate can very easily find a job, with a salary higher than the average entry positions. The combination of technical competences and foreign languages (other than English or French) could also be highly desirable.

While jobs migrating from the West towards the East are typically in the service sector, most of Romanian labour migrants in the West take up jobs in agriculture, caring-services and constructions, which are place-bound jobs. Thus, even if the migration of jobs for the service sector continues, it might have little impact on diminishing the out-migration of labourers, because they most probably lack the skills required to perform the outsourced jobs.

Looking at a micro level and on the short term, the experience of working for a transnational corporation could make for an attractive CV and a desirable future employee for other companies. However, on a larger scale and on the long run, in case that (many of) the large corporations that employ this highly-skilled workforce decide to leave Romania, the remaining pool of qualified unemployed individuals would be too large to be possibly absorbed by the remaining job market.

The high competitiveness of the global job market puts high pressures on individuals to constantly keep improving their skills range and "employability". Taking things even further in this respect, Bloom (2013) speaks about the discourse encouraging the continuous individual strive for remaining or becoming fully employable in terms of self-exploitation. This paper explored these processes in the case of "brains without bodies" working in the "non-places" of service-sector companies and serving Dutch clients and customers. It showed that, in addition to technical and foreign language skills, workers from the outsourced or relocated services sector are also encouraged to develop a

range of soft skills, such as cultural navigation and adaptation of identity to the customer whom they are interacting with at a certain moment. The manifold implications for the persons working in this sector, including psychological aspects, should therefore be further researched.

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