Navigating International Sign in Glocal Deaf Networks: Developing Deaf-centred Methodologies in Transnational Deaf Community Spaces

Naviguer en langue des signes internationale dans les réseaux sourds mondiolocaux : développer des méthodologies centrées sur les personnes sourdes dans les espaces communautaires transnationaux

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Abstract

This study is an autoethnographic exploration of the experiences of a Brazilian deaf PhD student based in Sweden who conducted fieldwork in Lithuania's deaf community spaces. It seeks to demonstrate the process of navigating glocal deaf networks, addressing Lithuanian deaf community spaces as a deaf PhD student in International Sign, and developing mutual understanding and collaboration on deaf-centred research. Following a year of continued collaboration, this case study focuses on the initial data collection phase, which occurred before, during, and immediately following the first fieldwork visit to Lithuania. The research design included participant observations and individual video-recorded interviews in International Sign. The study reflects on the role of glocal deaf networks in deaf-centred research, starting with sharing ideas, mutual support, and connecting people in multilingual contexts. Technology and virtual spaces were fundamental for maintaining and expanding glocal deaf networks. The study highlights International Sign as a powerful communicative practice enabling connections across glocal deaf community spaces, important to think of deaf-centred research methods. However, it also recognises that unequal access to glocal deaf networks, such as linguistic and financial barriers, can create a scenario where not all deaf voices can participate equally. Therefore, while glocal deaf networks offer significant opportunities for collaboration, more equitable access is needed to fully empower deaf-centred research on a global scale.

Résumé

Cette étude propose une exploration autoethnographique des expériences d'une doctorante sourde brésilienne, résidant en Suède, ayant mené un travail de terrain au sein des espaces communautaires sourds en Lituanie. Elle vise à illustrer le processus de navigation dans les réseaux sourds mondiolocaux, à aborder les dynamiques propres aux communautés sourdes lituaniennes en tant que chercheuse sourde utilisant la langue des signes internationale, et à favoriser une compréhension mutuelle ainsi qu'une

collaboration autour de recherches centrées sur les personnes sourdes. Après une année de collaboration continue, cette étude de cas se concentre sur la phase initiale de collecte de données, qui s'est déroulée avant, pendant et immédiatement après la première visite de terrain en Lituanie. Le protocole de recherche reposait sur des observations participantes et des entrevues individuelles enregistrées en vidéo, menées en langue des signes internationale. L'étude interroge le rôle des réseaux sourds mondiolocaux dans la construction de méthodologies de recherche centrées sur les personnes sourdes, en mettant en lumière le partage d'idées, le soutien mutuel et les connexions entre individus dans des contextes multilingues. Les technologies et les espaces virtuels ont joué un rôle essentiel dans le maintien et l'élargissement de ces réseaux. Elle souligne également la langue des signes internationale comme une pratique communicative puissante, capable de tisser des liens entre les espaces communautaires sourds mondiolocaux, et fondamentale pour penser des approches de recherche inclusives. Toutefois, l'étude reconnait que l'accès inégal à ces réseaux, notamment en raison de barrières linguistiques ou financières, peut limiter la participation équitable de toutes les voix sourdes. Ainsi, bien que ces réseaux offrent des opportunités précieuses de collaboration, un accès plus équitable demeure nécessaire pour renforcer pleinement la recherche sourde à l'échelle mondiale.

Keywords
Deaf community; Glocal networks; International Sign; Transnational research; Sign Language

Mots-clés
Communauté sourde; réseaux mondiolocaux; langue des signes internationale; recherche transnationale; langue des signes

Introduction

How are you going to get there? As a Brazilian deaf woman doing my doctoral education in social work in Sweden, researching health experiences of deaf people in Lithuania, I was often asked that same question. In this paper, I will explore the impact of glocal deaf networks—spaces where local and global phenomena intersect—in deaf-centred research in a transnational context. The aim is to reflect on deaf-centred research methodology and communication strategies in International Sign while exploring glocal deaf community spaces and networks.

Deaf networks are dynamic, fluid, and process-oriented phenomena made of people connected in clusters that often overlap and interconnect, creating a "small world phenomenon" of relationships (Friedner & Kusters, 2015). Complex and marked by interpersonal connections, deaf networks are constantly expanding and contracting following people's movements between virtual and physical spaces (Moriarty et al., 2024, pp.177). For example, someone involved in a local deaf network can simultaneously engage with global deaf networks through online platforms or physical mobility, creating connections with people worldwide (Friedner & Kusters, 2015; Kusters et al., 2024; Moriarty & Kusters, 2021).

Merging "global" and "local", the concept of "glocality" emphasises the interconnectedness of both local and global dynamics. Glocalisation is the process by which global phenomena are adapted, reinterpreted, and resignified in local contexts, resulting in new hybrid forms of culture, identity, and social practice (Robertson, 1995;

Roudometof, 2015). This interconnectedness facilitates the sharing of knowledge, resources, information, and cultural practices, enriching both local and global deaf community spaces (Friedner & Kusters, 2015; Kusters et al., 2024). Deaf sociality is embedded within this glocal context, as people actively participate in both local gatherings and international events, creating relationships that transcend borders and mutually influence local reality (Moriarty et al., 2024).

In transnational deaf spaces, when it comes to interactions between signers from multiple linguistic backgrounds that do not share a common national sign language, there is a communicative practice that combines elements of many national sign languages called International Sign (IS) (Crasborn & Hiddinga, 2015; Hiddinga & Crasborn, 2011; Kusters, 2025; Wit et al., 2021). IS is characterised by a higher degree of iconicity, flexibility, and transparency compared to standardised national sign languages (De Meulder et al., 2019; Kusters, 2024; Moriarty & Kusters, 2021; Rosenstock, 2008). Kusters (2024) defines IS as a translingual communicative practice grounded in a moral imperative for cooperation when signers from different linguistic backgrounds adapt their language to enhance mutual understanding. Studies on IS and its evolution have led to an ongoing discussion on its language status, with scholars stating it is the sign language of deaf people communicating on a global scale (Granado, 2019; Rathmann & Quadros, 2023). Acknowledging the high flexibility and the mutual meaning-making process, Rahtman and Quadros (2023) focus on the result of the language in use and the social outcomes for deaf people communicating worldwide.

In global deaf networks, IS emerges when deaf people from different language backgrounds communicate, very often influenced by local sign language, and further influencing local signing (Johnson, 2021; Rathmann & Quadros, 2023). This mutual influence can be seen as a *glocal* phenomenon, where local and global phenomena overlap and affect each other (Roudometof, 2015; Robertson, 1995). Rathmann and Quadros (2023) argue that by considering IS a global language, people can learn and practice it through contact with glocal spaces – physical or virtual – becoming fluent in IS and navigating glocal deaf networks. This process strengthens these networks by enabling contact with diverse cultures, creating new connections and allowing this knowledge to be taken back to local deaf communities.

However, the ability to use and understand more conventional IS versions is also linked to factors such as mobility and privilege and is not universally understood by everyone. Green (2014, 2015) explains that this inaccessibility mainly affects local deaf communities in the margins of the Global North, which have fewer mobility resources to access global deaf events.

In recent years, the internet and social media have significantly impacted virtual deaf community spaces, geographically expanding the possibilities for glocal deaf networking (Emery et al., 2024; Friedner & Kusters, 2015; Hiddinga & Crasborn, 2011; Johnson, 2021; Kusters, 2024, 2025; Rathmann & Quadros, 2023). An interesting phenomenon has been noted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the use of IS in deaf virtual spaces increased greatly, mainly due to the huge demand for fast-paced informative videos on a global scale, recorded in IS, and also due to the need to create and

spread new signs related to the health crisis, and the demand for virtual meeting spaces, now allowing attendance without national borders (Rathmann & Quadros, 2023). This increase in the use of IS during the pandemic may have contributed to making it even more widely embraced communicative practice for glocal deaf spaces, while also introducing new challenges in its use for developing deaf-centred research.

These strengthened networks create an interesting way to navigate through transnational contexts, and it is being explored by deaf researchers around the world (Emery et al., 2024; Friedner & Kusters, 2015; Kusters, 2024; Rathmann & Quadros, 2023; Sinkaberg, 2024). In this context, deaf researchers have conducted a variety of studies exploring the potential connections that glocal deaf networks can facilitate. Kusters et al. (2024) provide examples of ethnographic work from the MobileDeaf research project, where a team of deaf researchers worked on different subprojects. The authors highlight that ethnographic methods rely on building connections with participants, and being a deaf researcher facilitates these connections (Kusters et al., 2024, p. 27). This is due to skills such as having a broad linguistic repertoire of sign languages and IS, access to a range of deaf spaces beyond academic environments and being welcome in all-deaf spaces, such as events made by deaf people to a deaf audience. These spaces would be challenging for hearing researchers to access and navigate in the same way. Although being deaf helps researchers connect with participants, intersectional aspects such as race, gender, and cultural background also play an important role in influencing how researchers interact with participants and interpret findings (Kusters et. al, 2024, p. 27).

In transnational deaf research, the importance of considering the particularities of context, culture, and language is emphasised when approaching a deaf community, especially when researchers and participants have different standpoints coming from the Global North to the Global South (Emery et al., 2024; Rathmann & Quadros, 2023; Sinkaberg, 2024). Deaf studies and disability research have been largely dominated by scholars from the Global North, reinforcing power and epistemic imbalances that shape knowledge production in these fields (Hou & Ali, 2024). While deaf scholars from the Global South do exist and actively contribute to research, their work often remains underrepresented and struggles to gain visibility in the Global North due to structural barriers such as limited financial resources, and linguistic constraints—particularly the dominance of English in academic publishing—and the under-representation of Global South epistemologies within hegemonic academic frameworks (Friedner & Kusters, 2015; Hou & Ali, 2024; Rathmann & Quadros, 2023; Silva et al., 2023). This underrepresentation reflects an absence and a systemic exclusion that limits the diversity of perspectives within transnational deaf research (Hou & Ali, 2024). Knowledge circulation within glocal deaf networks in the academic field should not be unidirectional, flowing only from the North to the South (Emery et al. 2024; Hou & Ali, 2024). The less research conducted by deaf scholars from the Global South investigating deaf communities in the Global North highlights a gap in knowledge production. Adopting a "turning tables" perspective, where researchers from the Global South analyse dynamics and structures from the Global North, can challenge epistemological hierarchies and enrich debates about transnational

collaborations (Friedner & Kusters, 2015; Green, 2014, 2015; Harding, 1993; Emery et al., 2024; Rathmann & Quadros, 2023)

Starting Point and Purpose of the Study

My interest in investigating deaf people's experiences in healthcare started in Brazil, where I worked as a psychologist in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) and did a master's thesis on the topic. There, I had the opportunity to work with my community and to learn IS through academic networking among deaf community spaces, mostly in South America.

I finished my master's thesis the same year the COVID-19 pandemic started, and my concern about how deaf people around the world were dealing with communication barriers during the health crisis turned my attention to the international situation. By this time, deaf communities organised in multiple ways, such as virtual deaf spaces, social media, and even national deaf associations, acted locally and globally to advocate for accessibility in response to the health crisis. Along with this movement, the European Union of the Deaf (EUD) established an observatory to track the accessibility policies implemented by each Member State to provide information to support the collective fight for accessibility (European Union of the Deaf, 2023).

Because of my work, I have been closely observing the escalation of barriers to access to health communication and information. This led my attention to possible solutions, looking for places where deaf people were managing to find good resolutions to address the additional barriers to health access that have escalated by the pandemic.

Through the EUD observatory, I noted that Lithuania was standing out in presenting a resolute stance to many challenges brought about by the global health crisis. As an illustration, Lithuania implemented in the same year of the coronavirus outbreak an emergency channel available 24/7 in Lithuanian Sign Language (LGK), as well as equipping COVID-19 testing centres with tablets connected to interpreters for enabling communication (European Union of the Deaf, 2023). It highlighted the constant dialogue of the Lithuanian deaf community with the national interpretation centre and public authorities, for identifying demands and searching for solutions for better delivering official Lithuanian Sign Language interpretation on television (European Union of the Deaf, 2023; Stankevič & Mankauskienė, 2021). However, several of alike solutions were not being widely implemented across the EU, even in countries with a longer tradition of recognising their national sign language. As a country that regained independence only 30 years ago, Lithuania's deaf community was actively working on accessibility in a way that stood out. I found it particularly interesting to see those resolutions coming from a country viewed as a European semi-periphery, which deserves more attention. I wondered what was driving these initiatives and how similar strategies could be shared to benefit deaf people on a global scale.

Moving to Sweden a few years later, I got into new deaf community spaces and, although I could use IS to communicate with some people, learning Swedish Sign Language (STS) was important to communicate in everyday life. As my doctoral education in Sweden was connected to Baltic and East European Studies, my previous interest in understanding deaf people's experiences in health care was combined with the

opportunity to collaborate with deaf communities in the Baltics. Following my previous interest in Lithuania, my doctoral research came to focus on how deaf communities in Lithuania navigate communication barriers in health and social care, with an emphasis on collaboration between deaf communities and professionals in these areas. Given that I am in a predominantly hearing university and my position as a deaf doctoral student without a background in Linguistics and Sign Language studies, I began to question: How do deaf researchers navigate transnational research when they do not share a common sign language with participants, and what role do glocal deaf networks play in facilitating collaboration? Therefore, I first sought to understand this by exploring deaf-centred research methods that align with the experiences and perspectives of deaf collaborators working in the field of health and social care research.

The following reflections are based on my autoethnographic field notes, written during my fieldwork in collaboration with deaf communities in Lithuania. For the case study presented here, I aim to unpack my process of navigating through glocal deaf networks, approaching Lithuanian deaf community spaces as a deaf researcher in IS, as well as the process of creating mutual understanding and collaborating on deaf-centred research in transnational deaf spaces. I seek to reflect upon possibilities and limitations when doing deaf-centred research in those contexts.

Methods

As I write this paper, I have been collaborating with the Lithuanian Deaf Association (LKD), health and social care professionals and Lithuanian deaf people in the cities of Vilnius, Kaunas and Panavezys for one year. During this year, I made two field visits in Lithuania: August 2023 for ten days, and April and May 2024 for thirty-one days. In between visits, I engaged in a diverse range of virtual collaborations. The present paper will focus on the first phase of the study, and the process of approaching the participants and entering the field for the first time on the first field visit in August 2023 and the first two individual interviews conducted in International Sign. It will focus on the methods and processes of active collaboration for mutual understanding, rather than the content of the interviews.

The data for this study consists of notes taken in the field journal, including informal conversations and participant observations that occurred before and during the field visit. It also includes some field journal reflections on two online semi-structured individual interviews, made in collaboration with the Lithuanian Deaf Association (LKD). One of the interviews was facilitated by an interpreter, from LGK to IS. To build the autoethnography, I revisited the notes seeking a reflexive analysis approach following a narrative structure.

Following an emancipatory paradigm, the methodological choices were driven to emphasise the collaboration between the investigator and the community in the research process. In this context, I am between an outsider (foreigner) and an insider (deaf). The participants and I don`t share a common sign language and come from different social and cultural backgrounds. However, we share experiences of understanding ourselves as deaf and accessing glocal deaf networks and deaf community spaces.

The contact with participants was made through a snowballing process involving my contacts within glocal deaf networks. To prepare for the field visit, I sent videos recorded in IS introducing myself and explaining my research interest. These videos were initially forwarded to potential participants through key people known within the Lithuanian deaf community. The video conversations preceding the field visit were exchanged informally and individually, with five people from the Lithuanian deaf community and were important for establishing initial contact. Through this, it was possible to schedule face-to-face meetings during the field visit, both formal and informal, to clarify the research objectives and propose collaborations.

For the semi-structured online individual interviews after the field visit, participants were invited through prior contact with the LKD. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom and recorded in a controlled setting at my university to ensure visual accessibility. Ethical documents, including a consent form and an IS video explaining the research and data handling process, were provided in advance.

Crossing Deaf Community Spaces

The beginning of the fieldwork was driven by the challenge of connecting with deaf people in Lithuania. Since I am a newcomer in Europe, working in a majority-hearing university environment, I didn't have many connections in this new setting at the beginning, especially in academic deaf networks. However, from the perspective of being a deaf woman with an immigrant background in Sweden, sharing and networking in glocal deaf

community spaces available to me was a good starting point for expanding connections

and snowballing. In my field journal, there is an experience of sharing the research process

inside a local, Swedish, non-academic deaf space before going to fieldwork, talking to my

deaf STS teacher about my work:

> He asked me how it was at work (…). So, he gave me a pen and asked me to
> explain my research to him in STS. If I didn`t know any specific sign, I could
> write on the whiteboard or sign in IS […]. Then, I saw myself explaining my
> research questions and my methods, and it felt very natural to do it properly
> in a deaf space and discuss it together. When I told him that my research is
> connected to the Baltic Sea region and that I would like to go abroad, he
> said: "I have a friend in Lithuania, let's call her?" After a few minutes, we
> were on a video call with his friend, explaining my research in IS. I told her
> that I was planning to visit Vilnius for a summer school and would like to
> meet the LKD and explain my research to see if it would be possible to
> collaborate. This first contact was very promising, and I was told to get in
> touch later.

The passage illustrates that the research process can start with the sharing of ideas in sign

language in a local deaf space, having informal feedback and video-calling for glocal deaf

networking. Deaf networking in practice worked both ways in the virtual space, for

connecting and for maintaining collaborations:

> This process of researching using IS while living in Sweden and learning STS
> started to be confusing to me since it involved two different foreign
> languages. I felt the need to practice IS better before travelling. To do so, I
> constantly reached my deaf network in Brazil and practised with my peers
> who were skilled in IS; they were friends with travelling, artistic or academic
> backgrounds who could assist me in this warming-up process to maintain
> fluency in IS. Practising IS with people who also sign Libras clarified
> the vocabulary in health sciences and made me feel more confident about
> discussing my research in a friendly virtual deaf space, seeing what would be
> interesting to explore in the international space.

Remaining connected to my deaf local network in Brazil made me more confident to expand to other local deaf spaces by using virtual deaf spaces. In this matter, the role of technology in improving our international communication through video-call platforms and creating virtual deaf spaces is very fruitful. Sending recorded videos is a usual communication tool for deaf networking, allowing the message to be communicated directly through signing, and it can be done in formal and informal situations when navigating deaf community spaces.

> The field travel to Vilnius was approaching. A week before travelling, I sent a video in IS to the previous contact I had there, and I was put in touch with LKD representation. After sending a video in IS to the association, we managed to schedule a meeting in the association to connect. An interesting situation before travelling was talking to my deaf network in Brazil and realising I could also meet more people and connect informally while visiting the city, not only for collaboration but also to meet the community and sign freely during my stay. Then, a friend who is also a traveller, sent some videos to his contacts from Lithuania and after talking to them, he gave me their contacts and told me I could send them videos in IS to connect.

The snowballing process of approaching people through people is marked by building trust (Kusters et al., 2024). By sharing my research ideas with peers in deaf community spaces, the discussion of my research questions inspired people to participate by sharing their perspectives and being willing to help the investigation go further. Deaf networks work here as active collaborators, co-creators, and channels for navigating through multiple deaf community spaces.

I prepared my stay for ten days in Vilnius. As I first didn't know anyone in person, the connections made by my virtual deaf space networking were very important to help me understand where people usually gather and get to know more people in the local deaf community spaces. Also, even though it was a new setting, meeting people in sign-only deaf spaces, learning some signs in LGK and learning the story of the city from local deaf people, made the experience of approaching and being recognised as an insider, as a deaf person, and an outsider from Lithuania.

During one of these informal gatherings in Vilnius, I wasn't the only deaf foreigner among the approximately 20 people, and many people were signing in LGK and/or IS in different groups, creating a spontaneous multilingual deaf space. When I didn`t understand someone, I could also ask a person skilled in IS for informal translation and try to make myself understood with some of the new signs I was learning. Sometimes, when meeting someone new, people used to be a little confused by the information that I come "from Sweden" and it didn't match my South American face, so I had to explain "I am Brazilian, and I live in Sweden now to do my doctoral education". It could be a matter of language because sometimes when we sign, it can be interpreted in both ways (place/nationality) unless we use more specific ways to explain it clearly. Also, it led to very interesting discussions connected to accessibility in Brazil and Europe. As well as I presented myself as a doctoral student interested in investigating the experiences of deaf people in Lithuania, sometimes receiving good insights and questions about my topic:

> [A person] asked me why I wanted to study this topic, and I told some stories about my experience being a deaf psychologist in Brazil, some unfair situations I have seen connected to access to health care happening to my

community, and how it made me want to come back to the university to investigate the topic and it led me to do a PhD abroad. I told them a story about someone in Brazil not being able to call an ambulance during an emergency, and, commenting on that, they told me about an app connected with the interpretation centre 24 hours a day for emergency calls, used by many deaf people in Lithuania. People could either voice call 112 through the app or make a video call. I was impressed.

The above situation illustrates the importance of sharing experiences inside deaf community spaces and understanding that accessibility challenges can differ according to every context and person. Therefore, it is important to let the community guide the discussion to what is truly relevant to them, which promotes a more equitable and collaborative exchange of ideas.

By the end of the week, it was time the meet two LKD representatives to talk about my research interests and collaboration. By using a PowerPoint visual presentation in English, I explained my research questions in IS, and we translated some of the written words into Lithuanian to better their comprehension. During the meeting, it was interesting to observe communication in IS, aligning our signs, and using written English and visual resources to enable mutual and clear understanding (Moriarty & Kusters, 2021). Sometimes I used a few of the LGK signs I had learned during the week. Since none of us could fingerspell easily because the hand alphabets we were fluent in diverged so much, paper notes were very useful for writing specific words in paper notes, but it was not needed very often.

By using visual resources to enhance comprehension, the discussion turned to collective experiences during the past health crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic, and we

shared insights about the situation of deaf people worldwide. In addition, we discussed the role of the LKD association and the importance of collective organisation and dialogue with authorities to achieve the goals. We agreed to have online interviews with time to receive and review my questions in advance before recording. It marked the beginning of our official collaboration in the research project.

International Sign and Multilingual Interviews

Challenges of conducting interviews in more than one language, involving multiple ways of communication, interpretation and translations have been explored by qualitative researchers (Temple & Young, 2004). When thinking about qualitative research inside deaf community spaces, the preference for sign language is valued, as well as the ability to communicate directly with the participants (Anderson et al., 2018; Temple & Young, 2004; Young & Temple, 2014). When approaching this topic, some authors delve into the pros and cons of working in collaboration with interpreters when the investigator does not master the participants' sign language. However, studies mostly focus on cases where hearing researchers work with sign-language interpreters (Temple & Young, 2004; Young & Temple, 2014). Less common, studies focus on deaf researchers from different linguistic backgrounds approaching deaf community spaces where they have not mastered the national sign language of their collaborators (Elder & Schwartz, 2021). For the study, as there was no available time to learn and master LGK, it opened the stage for negotiating language between the possibility of directly communicating through IS or working with

interpretation between LGK to IS. In the following section, I will bring two examples of

semi-structured interviews conducted online and after the field visit, one with

interpretation from IS to LGK, and another conducted directly in IS.

The choice between using IS or working with an interpreter from IS to LGK was made

together with each participant according to their preferences. Before the first interview, we

discussed it together and agreed to ask for an IS interpreter to interpret between IS and

LGK. It is important to notice that when interpreting from a given national sign language to

IS, a work often performed by deaf interpreters, the IS interpreter uses different sign

repertoires to enable understanding among the audience (Wit et al., 2021). Therefore, the

interview guide with the possible topics of the interview was sent in advance to the

participant and the interpreter before the interview, so we could prepare in advance.

> The interpreter arrived at the Zoom meeting earlier, and we had a brief chat
> to align some signs we would be using, especially the specific ones involving
> health topics. Interpreter: How do you sign [fingerspelling] a-d-v-o-c-a-c-y? I
> answered with a combination of two signs, I believe that comes from
> American Sign Language, and we agreed to keep it, in that given context.

From my perspective, working with interpretation brings different challenges. Since

communication is mediated between two visual languages, it requires concentration on

the information and the rhythm of simultaneous interpretation to keep the interview on

course.

> When the participant joined us, we started. I explained again the research
> purpose, asking if there were any questions and for permission to record. I
> was a little nervous at the start and tried to stick to the script. To ensure
> clarity, we both had to pay close attention to the interpretation rhythm since
> the interpreter was signing at the same time as each participant, and we

needed to keep an understandable flow. When I was signing, I used to pay attention to my image in the camera instead of looking at the interpreter and, to clearly understand the other side, I had to look at the interpreter while the participant was signing in LGK. This exercise became more natural after a while.
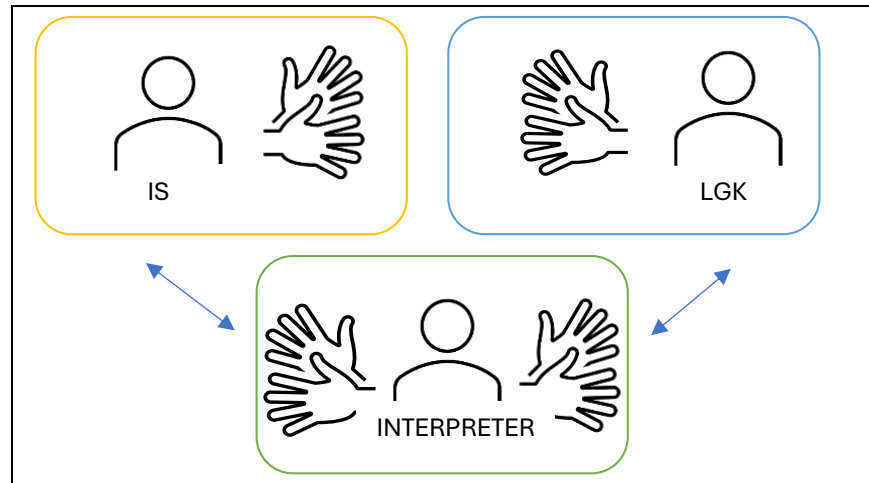
Figure 1. Illustrated representation of the interview setting with interpretation from International Sign to Lithuanian Sign Language. Description: a frame with three square frames inside it, two on the upper side and one on the lower side and arrows connecting the upper frames with the lower. Inside both the upper frames, there are person icons with one pair of drawing hands icons, turned to each other's sides, representing IS and LGK signing. The lower frame has a person icon with two pairs of hand icons on both sides, representing the interpreter.

The second interview was conducted in International Sign with direct communication with the participant. The choice was made by mutual agreement since the participant felt comfortable with IS. Unlike the first example, I didn't meet the participant in person during my stay in Lithuania, and we made contact online through the LKD networking.

As it was our first meeting, I was explaining the purpose of the interview for the research, clarifying the ethical procedure, such as the way the video recording would be handled, and which themes we would be talking about today. So, I asked: Do you have any questions? '-Yes. How did you learn IS?'

> And we started talking about international experiences, and I explained that I learned it mostly in South America, but I was getting used to the European IS from now on. It was around ten minutes talking about it before we properly started recording the interview, which was valuable to a better rapport and understanding.

When meeting someone for the first time and communicating in IS, being willing to know about the other person's background and experiences in deaf community spaces brings important clues for a skilled IS signer, and it reflects on our sign choices when choosing communication strategies from different language backgrounds (De Meulder et al., 2019). Because of the high flexibility of IS, learning it on different continents reflects our communication and choice of sign (Granado, 2019; Wit et al., 2021). Focusing on understanding each other, and having direct communication facilitated the interview flow, and it was visually smoother and easy to follow, allowing long narratives after a single question.

Discussion

The opening question and the final question '-Yes. How did you learn IS?' illustrates both the problem of entering the field as a deaf doctoral student, as well as the pathway for navigating glocal deaf networks and spaces. The discussions inside deaf community spaces I have encountered facilitated my experience in thinking about deaf-centred research. In this context, I experienced how IS brings possibilities for conducting deaf-centred interviews in a transnational context, improving the autonomy of deaf

collaborators, and placing sign language at the centre of interactions (Kusters, 2024; Rathmann & Quadros, 2023).

By navigating multiple deaf community spaces and making use of the internet, virtual spaces and technology to connect people, glocal networking could flow from people to people in overlapping deaf community spaces, in this case, Brazilian, Swedish and Lithuanian deaf community spaces. Deaf networks enabled the sharing of ideas about relevant topics and sparked people's willingness to support the development of research design and questions, as well as the recruitment of other collaborators. Virtual deaf community spaces were fundamental to maintaining networks and making new connections before the fieldwork. Technology played an important part in improving and enabling connections in virtual deaf community spaces, as using video calling and sharing videos strengthened sign language and IS communication. Although these strategies are already commonly used in virtual deaf spaces, the phenomenon observed by Rathmann and Quadros (2023) regarding the expansion of IS use in the Global South and regions considered on the margins of the Global North has been broadening opportunities to strengthen glocal deaf networks. As we go forward, this hyperconnected flow is becoming increasingly naturalised, creating more bridges for new connections, sustaining relationships, and cultivating collaborations that can be very fruitful for deaf-centred transnational research.

The experience of entering the field and approaching people in the Lithuanian deaf community made me reflect on my position as an insider-outsider as a fluid exchange and learning process. Having informal meetings in deaf community spaces was crucial to

learning about the local context and deaf community demands, which were different from where I came from and from where I live. Sharing experiences in deaf community spaces and the ability to sign made these exchanges possible, bringing a sense of connection around what is similar. Here, I'm not referring to the idea of deaf universalism, there is a wide diversity of cultural, linguistic, and individual differences within deaf people and communities (Kusters et al., 2024). However, by focusing on visuality, sign language, and shared practices in deaf community spaces, it was possible to find connections with people coming from plural backgrounds.

Using IS was essential to create connections in the field, both at informal and formal meetings. Using IS during the research process was an ongoing process of communicating, a way to engage deaf collaborators, and was central to developing a deaf-centred study in that transnational context. When meeting the association, for example, using multiple communication resources, such as PowerPoint presentations, writing, and fingerspelling in addition to a standard version of IS exemplifies how it works with mutual engagement to communicate and collaborate in research.

Communicating is flexible in IS, as it combines elements from multiple national sign languages. However, even when using a more standardised version of IS, there is a need for constant negotiation between signers to mutual understanding (Moriarty & Kusters, 2021). IS is available for some people who often engage in glocal deaf community spaces and have the opportunity to learn and practice it, since it is not as widely understood in local deaf spaces as national sign languages are (Kusters, 2024, 2025; Moriarty & Kusters, 2021; Rathmann & Quadros, 2023). Part of navigating transnational deaf spaces was about

understanding the best way to communicate in interviews or informal meetings and adjusting 'on the go' to enable better communication. In the first interview, working with an IS interpreter was a way of ensuring the comfort of signing in the participant´s national sign language and enabling clear communication during a multilingual interview. Even if the number of IS interpreters worldwide is limited when compared to national sign languages, working with IS interpreters was a way to explore opportunities for a deaf-centred research field, centring visuality and sign language in the interactions (Elder & Schwartz, 2021; Granado, 2019; Wit et al., 2021). Therefore, interviewing stakeholders skilled in IS, working with IS and deaf interpreters when possible and, ideally, learning the national sign language of the deaf community with which one is collaborating, is important when conducting data collection with deaf participants in deaf-centred research.

Navigating glocal deaf community spaces, using IS, and making good use of technology allowed me to connect local and global deaf contexts, facilitating collaborations that made the study possible. However, I recognise that access to these networks is not equal, since linguistic and financial barriers often limit the participation of deaf researchers from the Global South. To achieve a truly collective dialogue, we must make a move to centre the margins of deaf studies, amplifying voices and experiences often overlooked in dominant discourses (Ali & Hou, 2024). This shift not only enriches our understanding but also increases the flow of ideas across glocal deaf networks and spaces, including fostering more collaborative research practice. Knowledge circulation must be multidirectional, challenging hegemonies of knowledge that may reproduce limiting structures. As we move forward, understanding these complexities, glocal deaf

spaces could be great contributors to promoting and increasing equality and developing

deaf-centred research in transnational contexts. By creating equitable opportunities for

knowledge exchange, we can reflect the rich diversity of the global deaf community and

ensure that more and more voices are seen and valued.

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