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Deaf college students' selves within translanguaging space: protecting self-definitions while enacting flexible communication

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ABSTRACT

Deaf individuals can enact flexible and complex selves thanks to their access to multiple semiotic resources. These include, but are not limited to, signed, spoken, and written languages and other embodied resources. This qualitative study interviewed four deaf college students to explore relationships between communication experiences, selves, and translanguaging – the use of communication resources unbounded by named languages. Dialogical discourse analysis enabled an understanding of how participants used their multilingual and multimodal repertoires to express nuanced preferences or distance from languages in dialogue with varied recognisable social positions. Participants take discursive positions that make evident the dominance of spoken English in their lives, reflecting a longing for alternative, more inclusive ways of arranging communication. Findings are discussed in terms of the importance of considering how sensory orientations shape communication preferences and selves in deaf college students.

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Introduction

Deaf students show historical educational under-attainment when compared to their hearing peers (Powers, Gregory, and Thoutenhoofd 1999). In England, the reproduction of this gap at college level calls for closer attention to how the needs of deaf students are served in their educational settings (Young et al. 2015).

To enhance deaf students' educational outcomes, translanguaging has been brought to their pedagogies, thus promoting and valuing communicative flexibility (Kusters 2019; Swanwick 2017) through the use of semiotic resources beyond named languages (García 2009). In the UK, deaf individuals now have more access to languages, enabling them to develop bimodal bi/multilingual profiles, combining visual-gestural and spoken/written languages (Swanwick 2016). Despite its benefits, translanguaging in deaf education faces criticism. Restricted sound access and a preference for visual communication create a sensory asymmetry when deaf individuals communicate with hearing interlocutors (Kusters 2019; Swanwick, Goodchild, and Adami 2022). It is also feared that mixing language features may hinder signed language transmission and reinforce its subordination to spoken languages (De Meulder et al. 2019). Additionally, developing a culturally Deaf identity, distinct from 'deaf' as hearing loss, relies on signed language development, making it personally and collectively significant (Humphries and Humphries 2011). The World Federation of the

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Deaf (2019) states that an intersectional Deaf identity that can bring together different cultures is beneficial for the development of signed languages alongside, rather than opposed to, other options.

This article addresses our limited understanding of how deaf students are able to use the flexible communication patterns valued by translanguaging (Swanwick 2017) while maintaining their cultural-linguistic minority self-definitions (Humphries and Humphries 2011). This requires analysing how deaf students can both value and limit communicative flexibility.

Dialogism (Bakhtin 1981) is a valuable tool thanks to its concept of heteroglossia, which analyses how linguistic variations and stylisations reflect diverse cultural perspectives (Blackledge and Creese 2014). Heteroglossia values plurality but also examines how official languages are forces that unify and limit variation (Bakhtin 1984). This theoretical framework aligns with the article's analytical focus. The concept of the dialogical self (Hermans and Kempen 1993) analyses how individuals manage multiple self-definitions to regulate their activities (e.g. Gonsalves et al. 2019). Therefore, it can help in understanding how deaf students navigate intersecting self-definitions (Humphries and Humphries 2011).

In other words, the pedagogies of translanguaging for deaf students can benefit from engaging with literature on deaf individuals' self-definitions and their relationship with languages. This requires balancing fixity and fluidity in translanguaging (Jaspers and Madsen 2019). Named languages should be analysed as constructs – artificial yet valuable for individuals. This tension between languages as entities and fluid approaches has been recognised in translanguaging in education (Bonacina-Pugh, da Costa Cabral, and Huang 2021).

Overall, this study aims to explore how deaf students' self-understanding mediates their relationship with college contexts. The individual's interpretation of context is crucial for their development (Vygotsky 1994). Exploring deaf students' self-perception in communication and their pursuit of recognition in intersubjective relations (Valsiner 2002) can enhance our understanding of how deaf students make sense of their educational experiences (Bourgeois 1998), the communicational resources available to them, and their interactions in educational settings.

Exploring deaf students' dialogical selves via translanguaging

The study of deaf individuals' sense of themselves has often focused on static notions of identity (Leigh 2020). From this lens, deaf individuals might either identify with hearing people and prefer speech or identify more with the deaf community and prefer signed language (e.g. Bat-Chava 2000). Additionally, increased sound access, such as through cochlear implants, supports bicultural identities and the (rather static) valuing of both communication means equally (e.g. Goldblat and Most 2018).

In contrast, studies have recently shifted focus from static identity to the dynamics of becoming (Kusters, De Meulder, and O'Brien 2017). These fluid concepts show how deaf individuals continuously reflect on their communication, negotiating multiple identification claims with hearing and Deaf worlds (Humphries and Humphries 2011; McIlroy and Storbeck 2011). This study adopts a dialogical notion of the self (Valsiner 2002) to reflect this fluidity.

Originally proposed by Hermans and Kempen (1993) and inspired by Bakhtin's (1981) dialogicality, the dialogical self is a process of making sense of new experiences through a dialogue of I-positions (Valsiner and Cabell 2011). Individuals use these positions to regulate their actions. For example, a person may generalise their role ('I am a doctor') to guide their actions (e.g. stay rather than flee during wartime) (Valsiner 2002). However, the doctor maintains other roles, creating a dialogue between them that requires regulation. This tension is inherent in daily life due to multiple available positions (Valsiner and Han 2008).

A dialogical stance on selves allows for analysing multiple, overlapping positions being present simultaneously. Bakhtin (1984) described double-voiced discourse, where another's words are appropriated to create new, authoritative positions. For instance, parody is a stylisation that

mocks another's words, undermining their power. Valsiner (2002) proposed an expanding typology of such dialogical relationships between I-positions.

The construction of subjective positions in translanguaging has been studied through metalanguaging, or individuals' commentaries on their communication practices (Wei 2011). Personal experience contributes to meaning-making in translanguaging space (Wei 2011), intersecting with the environment (Pennycook and Otsuji 2014) and the body (Blackledge and Creese 2017) in a single, coordinated movement (Hua, Wei, and Jankowicz-Pytel 2020).

The concern with dynamic deaf selves and translanguaging is not entirely new. Young, Napier, and Oram (2019) also highlighted selfhood construction in interactions. Deaf individuals monitor their British Sign Language (BSL)-English interpreters' skills and intervene via translanguaging to project their desired professional selves (Napier et al. 2019). These issues should be explored in educational settings with deaf students.

The present study seeks to advance this dialogical understanding of deaf college students' selves in translanguaging. It is expected that illuminating this aspect of their experiences will produce a more sophisticated notion of their educational trajectories, with particular attention to the tension that may arise from navigating communication with different people and via a diversity of communicational means. Therefore, this study addresses the following question: How do deaf students draw on their semiotic repertoires to construct their selves in dialogue?

Method

This study is embedded in a larger project on deaf college students' translanguaging (Iturriaga 2021). The study received ethical approval from The University of Manchester research committee (Ref: 2018-4625-7510). An ethnographic approach (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019) was favoured to explore how participants attribute meaning to their own trajectories and translanguaging practices as part of their self-construction (Wei 2011). The main focus on this article is on the two rounds of interviews carried out, but the study also made use of classroom observations, field notes writing, reflective notes writing, and production of Language Portraits, i.e. visual representations of communicative and expressive repertoires (Busch 2012) to obtain a comprehensive perspective on participants' enacted translanguaging practices and their positioning towards them (Iturriaga 2021).

The main author conducted fieldwork and directed the process of analysis. He is a hearing, non-British researcher with an evolving comprehension of BSL and Deaf culture. Data production was carried out using his BSL Level 2 skills, and analysis was conducted while undergoing Level 3 certification. At the moment of writing this article, the author is undergoing BSL Level 6 certification. During the study planning, data collection, and analysis, he was also a member of the Social Research with Deaf People (SORD) group at the University of Manchester. Membership to this group included frequent communication with other Deaf doctoral and post-doctoral researchers in a BSL-led environment. This not only provided opportunities for linguistic development but also for cultural brokering, as colleagues would often explain British, Deaf ways of being to the newcomer researcher. Therefore, these experiences informed the main author's methodological decisions by making the study as deaf-centred as possible, including the consideration of culturally and linguistically acceptable ways of approaching and interviewing participants given the researcher's skills. As will be further developed in the analysis subsection, supervision with an experienced BSL user deeply informed analysis and interpretation of data. Crucially, the impact of the researcher's presence was noted through reflection. For example, one of the participants vocalised words in English for every sign during the interviews, something that he would not do during signed communication with members of college staff. This effort of adapting his communication to the researcher's presence left the overall linguistic structure of BSL untouched in terms of sign order but rendered his signing slightly less spatial and more linear.

Participants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four out of the five deaf students who consented to participate in the ethnographic study on translanguaging (Iturriaga 2021). The fifth student declined to be interviewed. Consent was presented in written English and BSL videos prepared by the researcher, and Deaf Support staff were present to support the process. These participants (see Table 1) were all profoundly deaf college students who used BSL to different degrees. They are referred to by using pseudonyms of their choice. Adam, who came from a hearing family, was exposed to multiple languages at home, with the predominance of English and Gujarati. He expressed preference for Signed Supported Spoken English (SSSE) to make his communication as close to English as possible. Katniss migrated to the UK with her family later in life, learning English and BSL during her late childhood / early adolescence. While she socialised with other British deaf signers outside of college, her college support included efforts to make her signing less idiosyncratic and closer to the standard. She often mixed spoken English and BSL with stronger adherence to BSL grammar. Matt expressed preference for BSL in his life, having to balance out his signing skills in Deaf, BSL-led spaces of socialisation (e.g. his group of friends and his partner) with some use of English with hearing people (e.g. workplace, his hearing parents, and his hearing sign bilingual children). His use of English was often subordinated to BSL structure. Finally, Sam showed the strongest preference for BSL. Her communication often relied entirely on fluent, fast-paced BSL without use of spoken English or vocalisations. She expressed a preference for avoiding direct communication with hearing people when BSL was not involved, asking for college staff to mediate or her father (hearing, BSL level 1) to take charge of spoken communication with third parties. Participants grew up in the UK, except for Katniss who migrated with her family from Afghanistan. Given this varied array of skills and preferences, each interview began by asking participants whether they preferred the researcher to use his speech along with signing subordinated to English grammar in SSSE mode or to focus only on signing without use of accompanying speech. The researcher adjusted his signing as much as possible to (his knowledge of) BSL grammar in the latter case, with Deaf Support staff intervening to clarify the meaning of his signing when needed.

Interviewing

Each participant was interviewed twice by the main researcher. The first interview explored past and present educational experiences and other everyday activities, with a focus on languages, semiotic resources, and communication. In the second interview, the researcher presented a summary of his understanding of students' communication repertoires to them. This allowed the deaf students to expand some ideas or clarify them. The researcher probed for personal significance and preferences for resources, communication partners, and communicative situations at all times.

Interviews were videorecorded and conducted at the college, in a Deaf Support Office. The researcher prepared the interview script. Participants were invited to answer however they wished, including mixing BSL with spoken English in varied ways. BSL Level 2 skills still do not include an understanding of the unique grammar of BSL, which is different to that of English (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999), so interviews were attended by a Deaf Support staff member to facilitate communication. On the one hand, Deaf Support staff helped clarify the researcher's signing when

Table 1. Participants' background and characteristics.

Pseudonym	Age	Hearing aid or cochlear implant	Family of origin
Adam	18	Bilateral cochlear implant	Multilingual hearing
Katniss	19	Bilateral hearing aids	Multilingual hearing
Matt	29	Unilateral cochlear implant	English-speaking hearing
Sam	18	Unilateral cochlear implant	English-speaking hearing

participants did not understand it. Staff members therefore simultaneously used BSL and speech subordinated to BSL grammar to clarify their contributions to all parties involved. On the other hand, Deaf Support staff also provided a free translation of deaf participants who showed a stronger preference for BSL, and/or had a faster pace of signing, and/or did not use any speech along with their signing. Therefore, their involvement was greater when the researcher was interviewing Sam and Matt. They only occasionally intervened to clarify confusions during the interviews with Katniss and Adam, who both communicated using some degree of spoken English and therefore were more approachable by the researcher signing at Level 2.

Analysis

The analysis of interviews happened after other data sources of the study were analysed. This, along with the sustained engagement in fieldwork and reflective ethnographic writing, allowed the analysis to be carried out considering a well-informed perspective on the practices and experiences of each participant. Besides, as was previously mentioned, contact with a group of Deaf researchers and, as will be explained later in this subsection, triangulation with an experienced BSL signer allowed to further inform the analysis by drawing on the available deaf lived experiences of colleagues and the associated social cues that influence communication. For example, Sam's rejection to accommodate to the communicative needs of hearing people around her by sustaining her fast-paced BSL reflected the overall communicative position of one of the researcher's colleagues at the Deaf research group. In other words, what may have seemed an isolated trait was seen instead as a recognisable social position that is often enacted in Deaf communities. This allowed the researcher to avoid deficit views, to draw wider connections across the data sets, and ask additional questions regarding the effort of deaf individuals to produce alternative, more accessible communication arrangements for them. As will be seen in the next section, this was crucial to inform the analysis and to highlight the uniqueness of present findings.

Two layers of analysis were conducted on the video recordings using NVivo qualitative software. An initial set of pre-established categories (i.e. hierarchically superior to codes) for coding included: content (i.e. what they talked about), opinions (i.e. how they talked about content), feelings, semiotic resources, and people. Further emergent categories were included to represent the analyst's emergent understanding of students' discourse and subsequent epistemic shudders – phenomena that break the analyst's expectations (Giugni 2005). Categories were used to generate subsamples within data. A total of 46 fragments of around 1 min each, in which participants mentioned and valued semiotic resources, were used for producing in-depth discourse analyses.

The second layer of analysis mobilised a model for dialogical discourse analysis (Larraín and Medina 2007; Larraín and Moretti 2011). Dialogical discourse analysis aims to study subjectivity as it emerges in communication, and is centred on utterances, defined not as grammatical units but rather as everything in discourse that points towards the speaker's positioning towards what is being uttered (Haye and Larraín 2011). For example, when Katniss quoted a hearing person's speech, the placement of that person as a referent in signing space, the tone of speech, and the signer's facial expression all conveyed simultaneous but differentiable layers of subjective positioning towards what the hearing person said. Signing space is the space in front of the signer, and its uses in sign languages include, amongst others, the syntactic location of people in space to convey the signer's meanings (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999), e.g. placing two social groups in opposite sides of signing space to signify the signer's simultaneous belonging and outsider status with respect to both groups.

In this model, the discursive subject is conceived as an enactment (Larraín and Medina 2007) that is partially achieved by the work of different dimensions operating in discourse. These dimensions include: (1) the utterance subject, understood as the protagonist or point of view of the narrative, (2) the uttering subject, the markers that reference the agent enacting the utterance, (3) traces of others, including particular or collective others, and (4) ideological positions, or the variety of

perspectives around a theme. For a deeper description of the dimensions, see Iturriaga (2021). After dimensions are identified, analytical focus is given to the varied possible relationships between them, and the resulting ideological positioning (Aveling, Gillespie, and Cornish 2015). The simultaneous co-existence of varied ideas, positions and voices in discourse constitute a polyphonic assumption underlying this analysis (Bakhtin 1981; Larraín and Moretti 2011).

This was a novel application of dialogical discourse analysis to accommodate analysis of this complex material. The original dialogical discourse analysis categories proposed by Larraín and Medina (2007) were centred on how subjectivity emerges in spoken/written language. Therefore, analysis was re-worked to include translanguaging in participants' signed discourse. As with other analyses that emphasise the creative aspects of translanguaging (e.g. Wei 2011), analytical codes were flexible and retrospective – they started from meaning and then traced back how different semiotic resources were layered in creating it.

The data fragments presented here show first a capitalised sign-by-sign translation closer to BSL structure (often termed 'gloss'), followed by a full translation to English. The use of gloss to represent a Signed Language, despite being the often-preferred way to depict it in publications, is not without its controversies. Slobin (2008) refers to this as the 'tyranny of glossing'. Reducing a sign to its gloss translation is not a neutral way of conveying meaning. Rather, it obscures the sign's original meaning while hiding the analyst's decision-making process. This is particularly concerning when no visual representation is added (Hochgesang 2022). However, glosses are used in a different way when it comes to presenting findings in the next section. Glosses are not meant to represent objectively signed discourse. On the contrary, this double-layered process is meant to convey the imperfect nature of translation, making interpretation transparent and potentially opening it to dispute from other perspectives. This illustrates the always challenging process of translating from a visual-gestural language that relies on three dimensions of space plus time to convey meaning, into another language in its written modality, which always entails limitations (Temple and Young 2004).

Analysis was carried out directly on videos. Triangulation was enabled in a supervision setting that included an experienced hearing BSL user. During this process, the researcher brought written fragments of discourse-analysed data, including both the gloss and English translation version. Through discussion with the supervisor, there was a reconstruction of how participants signed while expressing themselves, refocusing the analysis on signed discourse. This allowed considering linguistic, experiential, and cultural aspects of expression, clarifying the idiosyncratic ways in which participants enacted their positions. For example, the researcher made emphasis on how participants signed SPEECH and SIGNS rather than referring to named languages, as in BSL and ENGLISH. While this adds a fascinating layer of analysis given the focus on sensory modes, the supervisor made emphasis on this being the usual way in which languages are referred to in everyday conversations in the Deaf community. Therefore, by equating languages with the sensory modes in which they were being experienced, participants enacted some level of deaf socialisation while also reflecting their lived experience through the discursive resources they mobilised. In this way, triangulation increased the layers of interpretation while also checking that the researcher's interpretations were adequately supported by the researcher's overall comprehension of students' discourse.

Deaf college students' dialogical positioning efforts

Analysis highlighted the tension-filled space within which deaf students enacted their selves. This tension was the product of heteroglossia (Blackledge and Creese 2014): the many semiotic resources that deaf students used were valued differently or connected to specific social groups. To reflect the ways in which selves were constructed by reacting in different ways towards this tension, the analysis is presented according to their articulation in three moments: (1) moments in which deaf selves reflected a dichotomic position regarding semiotic resources and social groups; (2) moments in

which deaf selves encompassed multiple options beyond dichotomies; (3) moments in which deaf selves voiced one position through another – in dialogical terms, via double-voicing (Bakhtin 1981; Valsiner 2002).

Dichotomic deaf selves

Moments of dichotomy in deaf students' discourse included preference for communicative situations such as congregated deaf-only classrooms and informal talk with deaf friends. In the following fragment, Sam (Video 12, 07:06-07:35)[1] described communication at one of her previous schools:

Sam: ME CLASS DIFFERENT. YEAR 4, YEAR 5, YEAR 6 SMALL-GROUP. DEAF, STAFF SIGNING. THERE STAFF SPEECH, DIFFERENT [emphasised], APART [emphasised].
Sam: I was in a different class. Year 4, 5 and 6, it was a small group. All deaf, with staff that signed. Outside staff would speak. It was really different, apart.

Sam's placement of the sign for CLASS is done closely to her body in the signing space and is presented in the first person singular to emphasise the possession of the class being close to her. Both SIGNING and STAFF are associated with it via pointing gestures, making associations between people and semiotic resources. In contrast, SPEECH is associated with a vague placement in signing space that is away from the body and shown in the third person. This spatial distancing within her articulation acquires a new layer of meaning after she adds DIFFERENT and APART. This places her as enacting a gap between inside and outside herself that is related to people and their ways of communication. Sam's signing space from a bird's eye view is represented in Figure 1.

This position is further refined when the sign for CLASS becomes GROUP, signed even closer to her body with her shoulders forward, emphasising the small size and possession of it. It now becomes more clearly associated with DEAF and again with STAFF SIGNING. The differences

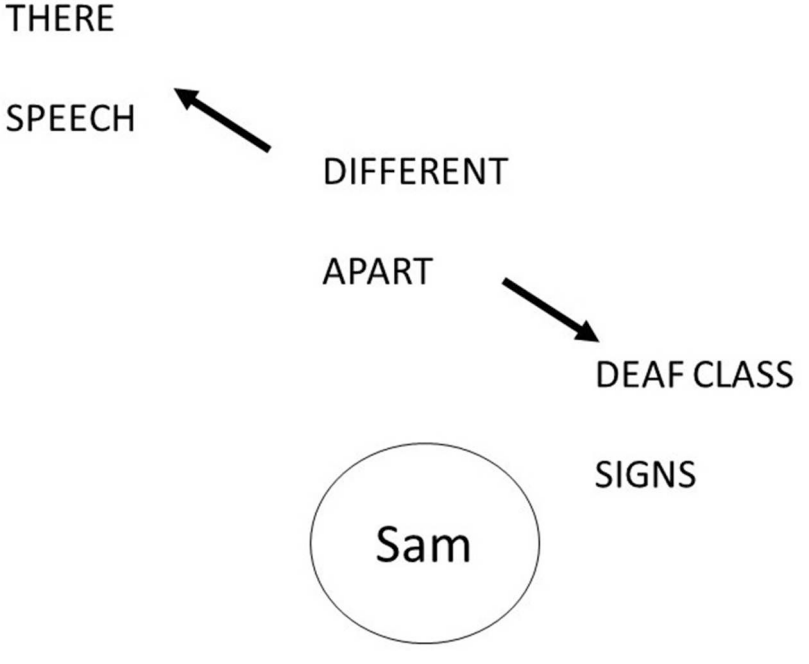

Figure 1. Placement of referents in Sam's signing space.

from the 'outside' are redoubled by repetition and greater emphasis in signing, which strongly positions Sam closer to deaf and signing staff and separated from speaking staff.

The resulting ideological positioning of this fragment includes both explicit and implicit levels. Sam explicitly enacts a symbolic division in social space due to communication with a focus on sensory aspects (speech and signing rather than English and BSL). This inaugurates a point of tension in the discursive field that is resolved by her positioning. Her placement of herself within the signing space implicitly advances the idea that she is more closely aligned with that class where staff and other deaf students signed.

The converse of this could be found in moments in which deaf students described situations of giving up on communication with hearing interlocutors. Matt (V02, 03:24-03:34) talked about communication at work, describing how he handles communication with hearing workmates:

Matt: TRY TEXTING THEY. REALLY. THEY SOME TALK [Modified for speaking-each-other] BUT MORE FOCUSED [Emphasis] WORK, LOVE CARRY-ON, WHY HAPPY [Disgusted face expression] LEAVE-THEM [Downwards] CARRY-ON, LEAVE-THEM [Looking away].

Matt: I try texting them. They … really, they talk to each other a bit, but I am much more focused on work, I love that. I carry on with my work because I am quite happy to let them go on, I just let them.

Work colleagues are described merely as a general and collective THEM. The sign he used for TALK is odd because it emphasised the act of speaking as in two *mouths* talking in front of one another, i.e. the organs of spoken language articulation are used to describe talk, rather than a more discursive sign that might imply 'chatting'. It could have been that Matt was increasing the iconicity of his signs for me, making them resemble their referents so a person with basic BSL knowledge could understand them. Or it might have been a more conscious differentiation about what talk was meaning to him – mouths moving, rather than comprehension through speaking. Later, when signing LEAVE-THEM, he places work colleagues in a lower signing spatial location, in a way that implicitly signals their relative inferiority – placing himself above them. Perhaps this arose from a perception of himself as being able to continue with work regardless. The way he looks away while signing the second iteration of LEAVE-THEM emphasises this disconnection. This positioning effort has the ideological effect of allowing Matt to dismiss the importance of establishing informal communication on equal terms with hearing people based on being focused on more relevant matters. This stands in contrast with how he states elsewhere enjoying signed communication with deaf friends at home. The overall ideological effect is the enactment of a communicational barrier between hearing and deaf people.

Pluralistic deaf selves

The second type of discursive movements included moments in which apparently dichotomous tensions were resolved by resorting to flexibility and multilingualism.

Katniss expressed competency in multiple languages, including communication with her parents from Afghanistan and family and friends in Pakistan. Katniss' social life includes both hearing and deaf friends, as was explored in the following fragment (V06, 05:54-06:20):

Katniss: HERE. HERE FRIEND TWO GIRL. THEY SIGN [Relaxed] [nod]. TALK MORE ENCOURAGE CONVERSATION [eye roll]. THEY OTHER FRIEND, SPEAK VOICE SPEAK. 'can't' HEAR MISS 'what say? oh' [understand face expression] AGAIN.

Katniss: Here in college, here my friends are two girls. They can sign. We talk more, we converse loads. Another friend, they speak with their voice. When I cannot hear and miss something I say 'what say?'. They express understanding and repeat what they said.

(…)

Katniss: 'what say?' AGAIN [understand face expression] 'what?' AGAIN. USUALLY WRITE [bothered face expression] SHOW 'oh' [surprised face expression].

Katniss: I say 'what say?' They repeat, I understand. I say 'what?', they repeat. I usually write and show it to them. They express understanding.

On one side of her signing space, Katniss places her deaf friends with various markers that indicate that SIGN, TALK and CONVERSATION are relaxed activities. The hearing friend is placed at the other side of her signing space, in a differentiated but symmetric manner – giving them equal worth. Katniss shows effort in communicating with her hearing friend, however, and her discourse becomes translanguaged mixing face expressions and signs with spoken English. Her bothered expression during WRITE adds a mild tone of dislike for having to do this. Multilingual competency can be observed but also how Katniss makes concessions to hearing interlocutors in order to be able to maintain social bonds across language preferences and sensory orientations.

The students' positioning efforts in discourse show that communication in some situations continues to be more effortful than in others. For example, the following fragment (V09, 08:20-08:55) shows Adam's flexible yet marked preferences:

Adam:	PREFER, PREFER DEAF SIGNING THERE.
Adam:	I prefer … prefer deaf people … who sign … there [classroom].
(…)	
Interviewer:	But when you join courses with hearing people, how do you communicate?
Adam:	PREFER SPEAK [reluctant face expression].
Adam:	I prefer … to speak.

Adam's first answer regarding communication in college is an overall preference for deaf interlocutors who sign. Deaf friends are located THERE, in a specific classroom in the Deaf Support area across the hallway, marking that as an ideal communicative situation. It is only after I ask about joining mixed classes that he states preference for SPEAK, signing it in a reluctant tone. Once more, signing emphasises the sensory aspect of languages – signing and speech over named languages.

The overall effect of these movements is the enactment of discursive positions that traverse across languages and social situations, carrying tensions with them. Participants showed how many times they must be the ones to accommodate to others, differing from their stated communicative preferences elsewhere. The only participant that could not be found enacting these discursive movements was Sam but, as we will see in the next section, this was not a disregard of social bonds.

Double-voiced deaf selves

The last set of discursive movements were constructed in deaf students' accounts in a nuanced way. They involved moments in which social and communicative boundaries were enacted, but positioning efforts took distance from those boundaries by attributing them to others. That is, students acknowledge the existence of divisions but do not consider them to be personally relevant.

Sam mostly described communication with deaf friends in her interview, but there was at least one moment (V12, 09:34-10:51) in which she mentioned interactions with other hearing students at college:

Sam:	UPSTAIRS, HEARING. DIFFERENT. FOUR-PEOPLE DEAF. IN-FRONT-FOUR-OR-FIVE-PEOPLE HEARING. BEFORE UPSTAIRS RECENTLY. HEARING SPEAK UNDERSTAND. DIFFERENT, FOUR-PEOPLE-IN-FRONT-OF-FIVE-PEOPLE. THERE FRIEND MINE FRIEND WANT LEARN SIGNS [face expression of observing and understanding]. HI NICE MEET-YOU.
Sam:	Upstairs with the hearing people. It is different. We are four deaf people next to one another, in front of four or five hearing people. I was upstairs, recently. Hearing people understand speech. It is different, four people in front of five people. In that group of hearing people there is a friend of mine and I want him to continue learning signs so I can understand him. Things like 'Hi, nice to meet you'.

The mixed classroom upstairs is immediately labelled as different. Hearing people are described as persons who understand SPEAK and positioned away from her in the signing space, adding once more symbolic distance to the spatial contrast between hearing and deaf individuals facing each other. From the group of hearing people, one person is individualised and described as a friend.

The emphasis in WANT shows the strength with which Sam wishes them to keep learning signs. Social and communicative barriers are not unsurmountable, but it is hearing people who should make the effort for reaching out to deaf signers – subverting the usual script in which deaf people are expected to concede to a hearing majority.

Similarly, Katniss mobilised ironic tones with a distancing purpose. She described what seemed to be a recurring episode in her past, where she stayed conversing and playing until late at a friends' house (V06, 09:40-10:06):

Katniss: DAD HERE, MOM HOME PAKISTAN. ME DO 'What are you doing?' OFF [relaxed face expression] FRIEND TALK [repetition]. DARK TIME [surprised face expression] RUN ARRIVE. AUNT DO WHAT 'What are you doing?' [angry face expression]. NOTHING [looking away]. HEAR [negative nod] 'can't hear, can't hear' NOTHING HEAR. AUNT 'oh ok' AWAY [laughs].

Katniss: My dad was here and my mum at home in Pakistan. They asked me 'what are you doing?'. I said I'm off. We talked and talked with my friends. When it was dark, I realised it was late. Went running back home. My auntie would angrily say 'What are you doing?'. I said nothing, looking away. 'Can't hear, can't hear'. My auntie would understand and let me go [laughs].

Katniss was located at home in the past, along with the voices of authoritative adults. There is a sensory contrast established by the easiness with which TALK with friends is enacted repeatedly to emphasise its extension in time, versus the quoted reprimand of her auntie in spoken English, meeting 'deaf ears'. Here, deficit discourses on deafness and sensory asymmetries were 'quoted' in Katniss' supposed inability to hear her aunt – NOTHING HEAR – to escape younger people's expected subjection to adults. Her auntie's reluctance to continue the conversation after speech failed reflects hearing people's assumption of deaf individuals' communicational deficits, usually accompanied by an unwillingness to try alternative modes of communication. This distance, which is enacted by attributing those discourses to her aunt, is redoubled by the laugh at the end. Deficit discourses on deafness are thus somehow presented as a cliché genre voiced by other people.

These discursive movements result in a layered and highly dialogical positioning effort. Deaf students positioned themselves as if boundaries existed or norms (like reproducing the dominance of English) were important, while at the same time showing how they disagree with, or directly defy them. With varying degrees of explicitness, deaf students' positioning efforts produce a particular effect: while describing their actual social and communicative interactions, they simultaneously throw a sidewards glance at alternative ways of valuing communicative resources and therefore of configuring communicative situations, enacting the social places of hearing and deaf people otherwise.

Discussion

Deaf people participate in multiple, sometimes overlapping cultural worlds (Blackledge and Creese 2014), having to manage differential access to languages (De Meulder et al. 2019) and competing cultural membership claims (Humphries and Humphries 2011). The present study aimed at contextualising deaf college students' educational experiences in their translanguaging practices and associated construction of selves. It mobilised a form of dialogical discourse analysis (Larraín and Medina 2007) to highlight the relational and situational features of the deaf students' selves. Findings were explored in three discursive movements.

Firstly, deaf college students enacted dichotomic selves by showing preference for signed language and deaf interlocutors. These enactments were akin to one voice being dominant in construction of selves, according to Valsiner's (2002) dialogicality typology. These communication and social barriers constructed deaf and hearing people as discrete groups, reflecting the subjective importance of linguistic barriers and therefore of fixed language approaches to understand how deaf students may limit translanguaging (Bonacina-Pugh, da Costa Cabral, and Huang 2021). The sensory aspects of languages were emphasised to set boundaries, resulting in more static selves.

Secondly, deaf students also enacted pluralistic selves by expressing communicative flexibility and multilingual competence. This reflected a polyphonisation of voices in construction of selves (Valsiner 2002). This discourse was both translanguaged and reflecting translanguaging, revealing their status as bimodal bilinguals (Swanwick 2016). This fluidity, while not exempt from tension – deaf students had to perform concessions to their hearing interlocutors to sustain communication – shows how fluid languaging approaches (Bonacina-Pugh, da Costa Cabral, and Huang 2021) are also needed to understand how deaf students produce fluid selves in translanguaging space (Wei 2011).

Lastly, the most novel finding of this study was the identification of double voiced selves, with deaf students quoting normative scripts while simultaneously distancing their selves from them (Valsiner 2002). This way, deaf students constructed layered positions that reflected the multiple voices and cultural stances available to them in their cultural worlds (Bakhtin 1984; Blackledge and Creese 2014). Moreover, deaf students made subtle or direct references to alternative ways of organising communication via visual orientation and use of a signed language, emphasising the sensory asymmetries experienced in their everyday contexts while translanguaging (De Meulder et al. 2019).

Limitations

The present study could not include participants as triangulators of the discourse analysis stage of the process due to the project lifetime. Besides, following the discussion of the limitations of glossing (Hochgesang 2022), future articles could consider additional visual representations of signing or links to videos that reproduce the way participants signed their discourse.

Conclusions

Deaf college students in this study reflected on their past and present communication experiences, enacting affiliation with languages and people while expressing partial access to different semiotic resources. In other words, the discursive analysis of deaf students' construction of selves, from a dialogical point of view (Bakhtin 1981), reflected that their translanguaging practices still express preference for different semiotic resources, which may lead to limiting translanguaging itself.

Deaf college students' repertoires did not seem to follow strict boundaries between languages, and yet deaf students performed positioning movements that recognised and sometimes enacted social and sensory boundaries, reinscribing languages into their translanguaging practices (Jaspers and Madsen 2019). This is particularly relevant for deaf sign language users since their repertoires include different modalities and sensory orientations (De Meulder et al. 2019). In this sense, analyses also showed the importance of mobilising analytical concepts that allow exploring dialogue and contradiction, as participants reflected on social experiences of communicative inclusion and exclusion in their lives, shaping and limiting their selves (Valsiner 2002) as well as their translanguaging practices (Blackledge and Creese 2014).

Practitioners working with deaf college students who are sign language users could consider how curriculum and practices reflect the dominance of English, weakening their personal sense for deaf students. Their reluctant engagement in English-dominant pedagogies should not be considered an academic failure but an enactment of selves that might be personally and culturally relevant. Deaf students' partial or reluctant engagement in education should be addressed by contextualising it in their changing life and linguistic trajectories.

If deaf students mobilise translanguaging to enact multiple selves that, in turn, involve concessions to multiple interlocutors, future research could further delve into why this seems justified from deaf students' perspectives. This orientation echoes that of the research programme of translated Deaf selves (Young, Napier, and Oram 2019).

Note

1. Transcribed and translated video fragments will be referred to by using the following format: (Video number, time-time). Subsequent fragments will contract the format to: (V number, time-time).

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