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## **Mapping Deaf Academic Spaces.**

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## **Abstract**

This article focuses on the experience of signing deaf academics working in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK. I utilise a research method previously unused in this context, eco-mapping, to explore the ways in which deaf academics see themselves and their involvement in their home HEIs and in the academic field more generally. I review the available literature of deaf academic experience in the UK before using extensive quotes from research interviews to illustrate how the burden of making their own workplaces accessible usually falls on the shoulders of deaf academics. I also show that there is a lack of appreciation of the emotional labour and time demands that such work requires from the academics' workplaces using a Lefebvrian understanding of time. I end with some reflections on the method used and on the implications of the barriers deaf academics and those from other linguistic minority communities can face in HEIs in the UK.

## **Key Words**

Deaf, academic identity, sign language, disability access, eco-mapping, Lefebvre

## **Introduction**

While there has recently been interest in exploring the experiences of signing deaf<sup>1</sup> academics who work in higher education institutions, there is still very little known about how they create, navigate and maintain their professional networks. This paper fills some of the gaps in the literature, through reporting on the results of using eco-maps as frameworks for conducting in-depth qualitative interviews. In this research, five current academics working in higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK were interviewed. All were experienced academics who held post-graduate qualifications with teaching and researching

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'signing deaf' or simply 'deaf' in this article rather than the more traditional 'Deaf' to signal those who identify as culturally deaf and use sign languages as their first or preferred language. See Kusters, De Meulder and O'Brien 2017 for more in depth discussion of this terminology.

experience, although not all were active researchers at the time of the research. These interviews focused on mapping the professional networks of these deaf academics both inside and outside their own home HEIs. Eco-maps were used in this original application of the method not only as they are a recognised way of easily and logically mapping a participant's social connections and communities<sup>2</sup>, but also as a visual method which made use of the deaf participants' visucentrism, their visual way of perceiving and talking about the world around them (O'Brien and Kusters 2017).

It is hoped that those who are not specifically interested or invested in the experience of deaf academics will read this article as a case study of the barriers and burdens that members of minorities working within HEIs in the UK can face. Many of the lessons drawn from this research project can be equally applied to support academics who are disabled or who are from linguistic or cultural minority groups and who face institutional or attitudinal barriers to their inclusion in HEIs.

### ***The spaces and places of deaf academia.***

There has been some recent research into the experiences of deaf people working in HEIs (see Gibson, 1996, Woodcock, Rohan and Campbell, 2007, McDermid, 2009, Burke and Nicodemus, 2013, Smith and Andrews, 2015, Stapleton 2015, for example), however this research has tended to focus on the practical barriers deaf people face, such as communication, or cost of accommodations such as interpreters.

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<sup>2</sup> I use 'community' and 'communities' in this paper as a shorthand for the sort of deaf groups/social gatherings/communal organisations that deaf people may be involved in. I am aware of the recent problematisation of the term 'community' in the field of Deaf Studies (see Kusters, De Meulder and O'Brien 2017), but it remains the case that many deaf people still use the term to signal their loyalties and identities, as, indeed, participants in this project did. I retain it here for convenience and to follow the use made of the term by participants in this project.

The current research project chose to focus on signing deaf academics' lived experiences, with focus on two elements. First, physical, embodied experiences of space and place; and second, their social experience of academia, or sense of themselves in the wider academic spaces within and beyond their home institution. Both are neglected elements of deaf academics' experience and this project aimed to uncover the ways in which deaf academics can navigate the hearing spaces of the academy in 'deaf' ways.

Signing deaf people's involvement in HE as the academic equals of their hearing peers in the UK is a relatively new phenomenon. Until the early 2000s, signing deaf people were largely limited to acting as cultural guides, language models, or research assistants in projects led by hearing academics (Baker-Schenk and Kyle 1990); or as sign language teachers. Since then, the number of deaf people with postgraduate academic qualifications who are employed as academics in HEIs has increased. Many of these are qualified to lead research projects, as well as teach academic material rather than being simply sign language tutors. Deaf academics have now taken positions of responsibility in different universities as centre directors, course directors, and research project PIs, which would be unimaginable 20 years ago.

Jones and Pullen (1992) is the earliest publication covering deaf people's experiences of working in academia in the UK. In this article, Lesley Jones, who is hearing, and Gloria Pullen, who is deaf, discussed their working relationship as they ran research projects into deaf communities in the late 80s/early 90s. Pullen's role in this research was as a cultural guide for Jones in the deaf community. While this paper focused specifically on a single relationship between one deaf and one hearing person, it was largely representative of deaf people's involvement in the academy during these years.

De Meulder (2017) wrote retrospectively about the period from the 1980s to the 1990s based on interviews with four deaf scholars who worked within a research centre in a single UK HEI. This explored the complex relationships between deaf academics (or scholars, as De Meulder terms them) and their deaf communities, a relationship that De Meulder defines as between deaf subalterns and a 'subaltern-elite' following Ladd (2003). While these scholars held a range of different roles, none held a postgraduate degree. The perception of them within their local deaf community was disapproving, as if they were betraying their social and cultural roots by working in a university. In return, there was tension between what the participants saw as their obligations to the university, and their obligations to their community, a tension which remained unresolved.

Further development of the deaf academics' role was documented in Trowler and Turner (2002). This paper looked at a university department in which deaf and hearing people worked together. Again, the deaf academics' involvement in the university was limited mainly to teaching, with little opportunity for research (ibid, p. 233). Both deaf and hearing academics reported that deaf academics lacked access to the university's social and professional networks.

O'Brien and Emery (2014) focused on the academic progression of deaf people into becoming academics in their own right, rather than following the older teacher/cultural guide model. While this article did not contain any empirical data (apart from the personal experiences that the authors brought to it), it was important in that it attempted to re-establish the context of deaf people in academia. As noted by Jones and Pullen (1992, p.196), in academia the dominant discourse is the hearing<sup>3</sup> one. Funding, dissemination and supervision

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<sup>3</sup> I appreciate that the way I use 'deaf' and 'hearing' in this article presents them as monolithic concepts. Of course, there is huge variation within each of these concepts, such as race, gender, disability and so on. However, I am using these concepts in consciously essentialist ways, as this article is not the place to debate the variation within each.

of research projects are largely hearing-run. Not only that, but the dominant language of the UK academy is English, a language which in its spoken modality is inaccessible for most deaf people. As a result, deaf academics are working in an environment which is inaccessible to them in many ways.

## **Methods and materials**

### ***Eco-mapping***

Eco-maps were developed by Hartman (Hartman 1978, p.466) as an ‘assessment tool to help workers in public child welfare practice examine the needs of families’ (ibid) by mapping the major components of a child or family’s ecosystem in a simple pencil and paper sketch. Eco-mapping itself is based on using ‘the ecological metaphor’ (ibid, p. 467) which imagines the human ecosystem as not simply including air, water, food and other aspects of the physical environment but also including ‘networks of intimate human relationships’ (ibid). Eco-maps therefore are used to show the sources of support or conflict, significant people or groups, and also how these influences interact with not only the person at the centre of the map, but also each other. They are an attempt to visually represent the complex interactions of influences on a person’s life. Eco-maps have been used for many years in social care practice and increasingly in medical and educational contexts.

The eco-map itself is a relatively simple drawing, with the participant’s name in the middle of the page. Circles or other shapes can be used to show other individuals, groups or agencies connected by lines of varying thickness or arrows of different directions to show the strength and type of relationships between the different components of the participant’s ecosystem (McCormick et. al 2008). Thin or dotted lines between two elements of the map could show a tenuous relationship, whereas thick lines could show a close connection (Baumgartner and Buchanan 2010, p. 176). Antagonistic relationships can be shown by jagged lines or lines that

have been struck through (Jenson and Cornelson 1987, p. 175), and arrows can be used to show the flow of energy or support (Rogers, 2017). Often when drawing an eco-map, a template of some kind is used to guide its creation. However, some researchers have found this to be limiting, and have instead taken to asking participants to adopt ‘a free-form mapping approach’ (Rogers 2017) in which the entire map is created from scratch in whatever form the participant prefers.

Ecomaps were used not only as a way of organising the interviews, but also as a commitment to using visual research methods with deaf people. Deaf people have a uniquely visual way of experiencing the world, termed visucentrism (O’Brien and Kusters 2017), and it has been argued elsewhere that this visucentrism should be respected and utilised when conducting research with deaf people (see O’Brien 2018, for example). Other key authors who have argued for respecting or utilising this visual way of seeing the world in research with deaf people include Bahan (2008) and Thoutenhoofd (1999). Using eco-maps was a commitment to ‘enacting key aspects of... visual culture’ in the research project (Rose 2014 p.40).

I followed the ‘free form’ approach to creating eco-maps (Rogers 2017) rather than forcing a pre-determined structure on the maps. Again, this followed a key aspect of deaf epistemologies, that of the face-to-face ‘oral’ tradition (Bahan 2006), allowing each individual to show their own experience through personal testimony (Holcomb 2010), and for our collective deaf worldview to come to the fore through shared experiences (Miller 2010). To this end, and to facilitate free form construction of the map, I arrived at each interview with an A1 sized sketch pad, coloured pens and pencils and two video recorders. The smaller of the two video-recorders, a GoPro, was attached to a flexible stand and aimed directly at the paper in a wide angle setting to capture both the order and way items were added to the map. The larger of the two recorders was used to record the interaction which went on as the map was created.



At the start of each interview, I explained the aims of the interview, and the eco-mapping method. After asking each participant to place themselves in the middle of the map (some chose to draw a figure to represent themselves, others wrote 'ME' in a large circle), I invited them to add different elements of their professional lives and networks in the order in which they saw fit. Since this was an exploratory project, I used a topic guide during these interviews but did not allow this to structure the interviews overmuch, preferring to let the participants create their maps at their own pace and in their own order.

Both the recorded interview and the maps themselves were used as data. The use of maps as data is somewhat problematic as they contained a large amount of identifying information (Rogers 2017). Not only this, but the deaf academics in the UK are a 'small connected community', meaning that even the smallest piece of identifying information could reveal participants' identities (Damianakis and Woodford 2012). To avoid this, extracts from the maps shown are copies which I have anonymised and re-drawn. All identifying information has been removed from the quotes used, and gender-neutral pronouns have been used throughout. Quotes are unattributed to prevent a picture of each individual academic being built up, which could identify participants. All data used has been checked with participants to ensure that they are happy with the efforts made to protect their identities. This is not just to protect them, but also their colleagues and institutions.

## **Results**

Perhaps not unexpectedly, a key feature of discussion around each theme was connected the time spent maintaining professional and academic networks, and the ancillary labour that such maintenance required for deaf academics above that of hearing colleagues. Lefebvre (1971 [2016], p.45) divided time into three categories, 'pledged time (professional work), free time (leisure) and compulsive time (the various demands other than work such as

transport, official formalities etc.)’ (p.45). For these deaf academics, the pledged time, the labour for which they were paid each day, was expected to be equal to their hearing peers and colleagues. However, the deaf academics had to undertake additional labour to make their pledged time at work accessible, such as the greater effort of sociability required to break through communication barriers with colleagues, or booking interpreters or other support, with all the extra administrative tasks that required. I have termed this time ‘compulsive’ time, following Lefebvre’s use of the term to refer to ‘the time given over to the compulsions of work, such as commuting’ (Davies 2006, p.234) and ‘for bureaucratic formalities’ (Elden 2004, p.115). Without doing these extra tasks, a deaf academics’ labour would be impossible.

While time constraints or demands were not always explicitly mentioned by individuals in the interviews, they are implicit in the discussion of the extra responsibilities they shoulder to bring themselves onto a level playing field with hearing colleagues.

### ***Locating professional and academic networks***

All the participants who were active researchers were able to point to extensive professional networks outside their own HEI. These included co-authors, research partners, conference buddies and friends. This would not be unusual for an academic, deaf or hearing (see Robinson, Ratle and Bristow 2017, for example), but when compared to the small size of meaningful professional or even casual networks within their own institution, this becomes noteworthy.

One participant mentioned that they had only one academic contact within their own HEI with whom they could talk about their research –

*I'll just add my academic network, or my research network... Like I said before, I only have [] to talk to here about academic things, so if I want to talk more I have to go to other places...<sup>4</sup>*

In contrast, this participant was able to quickly add three different international institutions and eight individuals with whom they felt they had particularly close working relations due to ease of communication in sign language. Commenting on the different institutions listed, they said –

*I always have good conversations there. I talk about work, about careers, research plans, data analysis... it's good! Saying it's like a home from home is a bit too dramatic, but I know if I need something I can always ask them.*

Another participant had a slightly smaller, but very close network with deaf academics outside their HEI –

*When I need advice from someone who really knows what it's like to be a deaf academic, who knows the university system, who knows me, my work and my interests, [] or [] are very good colleagues.*

In contrast, within their own HEI their network consisted of a small group of other deaf researchers. Interestingly, they did not consider hearing colleagues to be in that network, something which will be covered in more detail below. Maintaining such networks outside their own HEIs required much more compulsive time commitment in travel and other time demands, than maintaining networks within their own HEIs.

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<sup>4</sup> All interviews for this project were conducted in BSL. Translations are the work of the author, who is deaf and bilingual in BSL and English, and have been checked and approved by participants.

Another participant was able to point to ‘loose and wide’ networks of international and national academic colleagues, most of whom were deaf. They showed they wielded a degree of academic capital (Dallyn, Marinetto and Cederström 2015, p.1039) through how they utilised this network –

*It's quite flexible. You know what the academic life is like. People contact you when they want you to do something for them. I'm the same, I'll contact others when I want them to do something.*

However, it is less clear that participants in this project were able to build academic networks within their own HEI. One participant responded that they only had one person in their HEI with whom they could collaborate or talk to about work –

*Really, my academic community is with []. I don't feel part of an academic community in [HEI]. I focus on our team. Yes, I like to know what's going on out there, but I'm just part of the BSL team.*

Others agreed with this sentiment –

*We meet for coffee and lunch sometimes. But there are lines here (separating individuals on the eco-map) because we don't really interact much. ... In terms of [HEI], I have mixed relationships, but none of them are really strong.*

While some felt that they were integrated to some extent in their home HEI, there were still struggles to build up an academic network –

*Some of my colleagues really don't think about who I am or what I do. For some of them I really am just 'the sign language teacher'. They don't really see me as an academic.*

This struggle to be recognised as an academic was echoed by all participants, for example –

*In the university, if you tell them you work here and you teach languages,  
BSL, you can see their eyes glaze over...*

Some participants tried to emphasise their academic qualifications in their meetings with other academics, showing their academic capital. Others were very deliberate in the way they approached networking, leading with information about inter-disciplinary or theoretical aspects of their work, rather than deaf issues or sign languages.

### ***Deaf and hearing people on the eco-map***

All participants worked with a mixture of deaf and hearing colleagues. Of course, it should also be remembered that all university work occurred under the ‘grand narrative of hearing’ (McDermid, 2009), that is, the assumption that everything in the university is run by hearing people, under hearing cultural norms, and the expectation that most staff will be hearing themselves.

Many of the participants had reservations about working in a hearing academic environment –

*Sometimes as a deaf academic you're seen as a trouble-maker, whereas if  
you were hearing asking for the same thing, would you be treated the  
same? I don't know... There's just a bit of an attitude there. As a general  
thing, some people seem to think disabled people just cause problems.*

Others reported problems with individual hearing people who questioned their ability to work in academia. When one participant was asked to clarify whether this was because they were deaf, they replied –

*I wonder... I do wonder... (whether there are other things going on) but I wonder if that's covering up deaf/hearing issues as well. I don't know. I haven't decided yet. But that's definitely in the mix somewhere.*

Others expressed similarly complex views about the difficulty of identifying exactly why they felt like outsiders –

*Sometimes as a sign language user I find myself slightly outside – I'm deaf, I sign, so could be an outsider in some ways. Emotionally, I feel part of the university, well, not 100%, but I'd imagine most academics would feel the same. I've got some uncertainty over my own status, my qualifications, my subject, my standards... but that's normal.*

When it came to relationships with individual hearing people, there were mixed feelings. All participants used BSL as their first or preferred language, although some used spoken English to varying extents. Participants' views of their hearing colleagues seemed to be coloured by whether colleagues were able to sign. One participant showed hearing colleagues who could not sign on the eco-map in a small circle labelled 'other [HEI] people – can't sign', separated off by a red line (SEE FIGURE ONE). Another's map showed that apart from three who could sign, all the other hearing people on the map (except interpreters) were administrative staff, people with whom they had contact only for practical reasons, rather than academic or even social interaction.



Figure 1. To show non-signing colleagues on eco-map

Other participants talked about the effort and emotional labour of working with those who could not sign. One participant spoke of their frustration when interacting with colleagues with only basic sign language skills –

*I feel like I spent the whole time just making them feel better about their bad signing, explaining, making sure they all understood. I felt... fuck it.*

A third was more expansive about the amount of effort needed to build up accessible social spaces in the workplace –

*It's a massive extra responsibility. It feels like a huge extra burden. But it's also about having an accessible environment. I always went out to talk to people, but very few ever came to talk to me, even when there was an interpreter sitting right there next to me. Often the interpreter would be twiddling their thumbs because no-one would come over... That sort of open environment needs 5-10 years to develop... it takes huge commitment... and then when people start to get it, they move on to another job!*

The comment about needing 5-10 years to develop a ‘deaf aware’ or ‘deaf friendly’ environment was echoed by another respondent who said it took ‘about 5 years’ to develop a professional relationship with hearing, non-signing colleagues –

*It was really difficult to build a relationship with them. It was really difficult for... say 5 years. We kept kind of missing each other, but eventually we made a connection, got to understand each other a bit more, and then had a stronger relationship since then.*

The burden of responsibility seemed always to be placed on the shoulders of the deaf person to ‘make the effort’ to accommodate their hearing colleagues. The amount of emotional labour and compulsive time commitment which goes into creating and maintaining these relationships, eats into the energy and motivation that deaf academics can bring to their role.

But being able to sign did not automatically mean that hearing colleagues had what was termed a ‘good attitude’ towards deaf academics –

*They learned to sign by going on a course, but being able to sign doesn’t necessarily mean you have a good attitude...*

A ‘good attitude’ involved being aware of the other barriers that deaf academics faced in the workplace, such as lack of access to informal networks. Someone with a ‘good attitude’ made the effort to include deaf colleagues in such networks, shared gossip and informal work information and offered support to deaf colleagues when they needed it. One participant commented –

*I have never got any emotional support from hearing colleagues. I still don’t know how yet, how I can... It’s also about progression within the university, because I would like to progress a little bit more, eventually. But*



*how? Who? I still haven't worked out which of these people (indicated hearing superiors on the eco-map)... they don't give me useful, practical advice. Sometimes I get the impression they don't really want us to progress. I'm sure that's not true, but...*

It is not just the deaf academic who is missing out here, but the possible benefits and value that they can bring to other colleagues and the workplace is rejected or denied (Woodcock, Rohan and Campbell 2007, p.371).

Other deaf staff members were usually drawn in closer connection to the deaf academic on the eco-map in comparison to hearing colleagues. These connections were shown by physical proximity, or by thicker lines connecting the representation of the academic with their deaf peers. It was notable that even those who worked more often with hearing colleagues, or who were part of a mixed team, deaf colleagues were usually added first, or very early on in the creation the map.

Other deaf staff were usually cited as sources of social or emotional support with whom academics could discuss ideas and research or teaching issues –

*I drew [] first because I work with them here in the office, but also because I trust them.*

*These people (hearing colleagues) are the ones I work with every day, doing what's in my job description, what I'm being paid for. But in many ways, these people (deaf colleagues) are more important to me, it's more important to maintain our relationships and collaborations.*

Deaf academics also tended to draw, or at least mention, other deaf staff they knew in the wider university, even if they did not work with them directly –

*I've added [] here. [] supports me with practical things. I support []... well, I'm deaf, [] is deaf, so I know it's important that I meet them for social, no, not social, I mean socialising at work. It's possible they might feel isolated or alone, so I meet them to chat.*

The participants were aware of the social needs of other deaf people in their HEIs, and there was a sense of solidarity with them which transcended the divides between academic and other staff roles and the hierarchical issues that this sometimes involves. This could be a manifestation of the collectivist orientation of deaf academics (McDermid 2009, p.233).

One academic spoke about how they were able to subvert the hierarchical divides in their HEI to find a source of support in hearing administrative staff, again emphasising the importance of attitude over sign language fluency –

*I was much closer to them than to others in my department. I got on better with them because although I know they're admin and I'm an academic, I felt we were on the same level, we could talk... When I first started here, I felt I wasn't good enough or clever enough to work in a university. I didn't understand what was going on, I really struggled because I didn't have an interpreter, I had so many problems with AtW<sup>5</sup>. But with [admin staff] I felt an immediate connection. They gave me a lot of help and support and told me all about what was going on.*

Deaf academics face different barriers to collegiality and social connections in their workplace, including colleagues' fluency in sign and the cultural differences between deaf and hearing people. However, each participant found their own way of navigating these

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<sup>5</sup> Access to Work (or AtW) is a UK Government scheme which provides a grant to pay for extra costs incurred by disabled people in accessing the workplace. For deaf academics in the UK, this funding is often used for (but is not limited to) paying for BSL/English interpreters.

barriers, either by forming their own support networks or shouldering the massive burden of creating a more accessible space for themselves by educating their colleagues and being proactively sociable. A significant finding of this project was the importance of wider academic networks with other deaf academics from outside their own HEI. This is only recently possible, with the growing body of professionalised deaf academics around the world and technological advances that allow real-time communication in sign languages. This allows the formation of deaf networks who ‘get’ one another and seem to no longer be held back by traditional views of university as not being a place for deaf people (De Meulder 2017, p.118-121).

### ***The location of sign language interpreters in the eco-map***

An essential part of a signing deaf academics’ job working in an audiocentric university is to work with sign language interpreters. All participants recognised that without sign language interpreters, and the Access to Work funding that paid for them<sup>6</sup>, they would not be able to do their jobs as effectively, however there were some cases where they felt working with interpreters detracted from their efficacy.

This ambivalence was shown in the placement of interpreters on the eco-maps. One participant drew interpreters scattered throughout their map, representing the ad-hoc and irregular presence of interpreters in their working life. One added interpreters almost in a liminal space, floating among the other people in their HEI, representing the fact that interpreters were almost mediators of their contact with the wider university. Others drew interpreters in very considered locations. FIGURE 2 shows how one academic positioned the interpreters, as adjacent to, but separate from their core team. FIGURE 3 shows how another

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<sup>6</sup> None of these academics had full time interpreter support. Some did have structured interpreter hours in that they organised their interpreters to be present in regular blocks of time each week. Others took a more ad hoc approach and booked interpreters as and when needed.

showed interpreters as crossing the boundaries between the core team and the rest of the university.

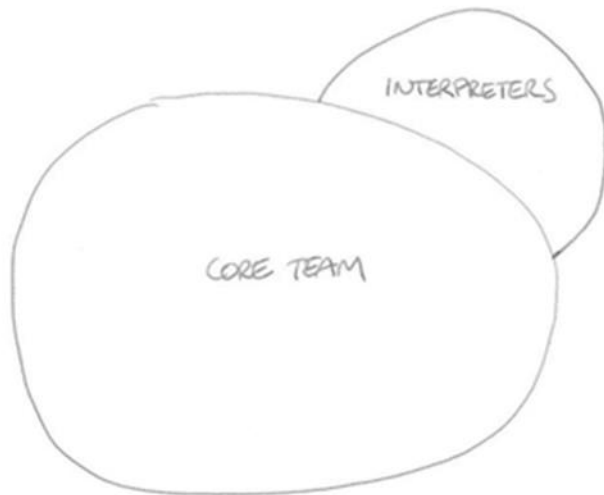


Figure 2. To show interpreters on eco-map (1)

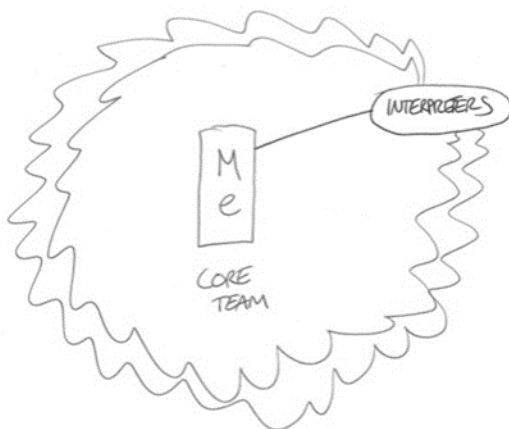


Figure 3. To show interpreters on eco-map (2)

These complex relationships with interpreters were reflected in the interviews. Some of the academics had limited contact with other deaf people in their workplace or in their social life. They regarded the interpreters they worked with as their contact with the deaf community –

*...that can be a contact point for me with the wider deaf community. What's the phrase... they're like my moles, my informers about what's going on out there. Because I don't get out to deaf clubs much, or spend time online reading about what's going on, interpreters are important for this, for me. I know it's strange! The interpreters become like an information service or a news service.*

Others were very clear about the place interpreters had in their working lives –

*Sometimes they're involved in our discussions as a team. During our team meetings, sometimes I might invite the interpreter to add their opinion, so there is some involvement. Other times we feel that isn't appropriate and we keep the discussion amongst ourselves and leave the interpreters out of it.*

The biggest issue that all academics found with working with interpreters was that it represented an extra drain on their time and energy (Woodcock, Rohan and Campbell 2007, Burke and Nicodemus 2013, Stapleton 2015, Haualand 2017). While it might be assumed that all interpreting is done 'on the spot', effective, accurate interpretation is the product of extensive preparation. Interpreters, in order to do their best work, require background knowledge about the context of what is being said. They also need to become familiar with the person they are interpreting for either through spending time with them, or the provision of copious amounts of preparatory materials ('prep'), both of which come with the temporal costs of more compulsive time commitment<sup>7</sup> (see, for further discussion, De Meulder, Napier and Stone 2019). The deaf academics interviewed for this project were all aware that these were demands that their hearing colleagues did not face.

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<sup>7</sup> Thanks to Dr Victoria Crawley for discussion on this point.

A significant finding was that the academics interviewed for this project took different approaches to this problem, some of which are outlined below.

One participant reported that they tended to work closely with a small number of interpreters at any one time –

*I'm constantly prepping the interpreters. Prep isn't a one-time thing for me. I tell the interpreters things as we go, because maybe they'll need to know this. Maybe not now, but in three weeks' time. When I need to draw on that preparatory work, I expect to be able to get it back. It's an investment, in the hope that it will pay off. It doesn't always work.*

Other deaf academics felt that approach did not suit their circumstances –

*I understand that sort of investment and development... but I see interpreters as a service. The interpreters I work with are good. I don't need to train them, they're already at the peak of their career. So what could I offer them? What could I 'invest'?*

*I have a group of about four interpreters I use for my teaching. They've all interpreted everything at least once before. They know the process... Over time, the time I need to spend on prep for them becomes less and less.*

The approach taken by the deaf academics to working with interpreters seemed to vary depending on location. Those working in areas with low interpreter density tended to work closely with a smaller number of interpreters with the aim of investing in them to maximise the payoff from the compulsive time spent on prep. Those who lived in areas with more interpreter availability were more likely to take advantage of the market forces that kept the

local interpreters' skills at a high level. In effect, they were using the social capital of working in a prestigious institution to attract more skilful interpreters.

Even using these strategies, there were still frustrations –

*I was at a conference about two weeks ago and I was chatting to someone at lunchtime who had asked me about my research. It was a bit frustrating because I had two interpreters, one of who I'd worked with a lot. I was using some technical vocabulary, fingerspelling it, and this interpreter just couldn't understand me. I was really frustrated. I'd used those terms a lot with them before... How can you be an academic if you can't communicate without it breaking down? You need that. It's hard when you work in a technical area. I know what I'm talking about, the other person knows, but the interpreters don't. It's hard. It feels like they're dragging you, holding you back when you just want to get on with things.*

None of the participants mentioned 'trust' (Haug et al. 2017) as a factor in choosing interpreters. If trust was involved, it was trust in the interpreter's technical skill and ability to use academic language, rather than personal feelings or relationships.

Prep was not the only time-related frustration that participants experienced with interpreters. Time was also spent emailing out requests for and booking interpreters, and then dealing with invoices after the booking was complete. Another frustration was the structure that interpreter availability enforced on the academics' work patterns –

*One thing that people often don't understand is they will email me asking to meet in three days' time. Well, of course, I can't. I need time to book interpreters. It's extra time, people have to wait while I contact interpreters, confirm bookings and so on.*

*I feel like, right, the interpreter is here, what needs to be done, what things are... Maybe I'll swap things around a bit because the interpreters are here, and I have some things that need sorting out.*

*I'll wait with things on my 'to do' list for an interpreter to come... It means other people are waiting on me... There might be lots of phone calls I need to make... There's also worry and stress. I worry about keeping people waiting or having to cancel on them. They might think I'm a time waster, but it's not my fault.*

Other participants mentioned needing to keep checking in with work, even during holidays, to ensure interpreters were booked (ironically, this happened during one interview, when the participant remembered a meeting they had to attend and interrupted the interview to note that they needed to check an interpreter had been booked).

Negative consequences of not having interpreters were not limited to colleagues left waiting for replies to phone calls. One participant reported they had received negative feedback from students due to complications resulting from lack of interpreter availability. The academic reflected in the interview that these comments fed into their annual appraisal meeting, which could well have negative implications for their job. This is something that could well have further negative implications under the Teaching Excellence Framework ratings, which are partly decided by 'students' views about their experience' (Office for Students, ND).

It is important to note that these demands infiltrated all three types of time outlined by Lefebvre (1971 [2016]). The need to stay on top of interpreter bookings invaded the deaf academics' free time in that they had to monitor bookings through holidays and weekends. The time spent on booking, paying and prepping interpreters is not usually covered by a deaf academics' job description, and so is compulsive time. Finally, interpreter availability



enforced unwanted structure on the deaf academics' pledged time in that they were only able to participate in certain activities if an interpreter was present.

*Loyalty to community and academy – liminality of experience*

A final theme from the eco-mapping exercise was the presence, or absence, of deaf communities on participants' maps. Three of the five participants explicitly included deaf communities or deaf spaces from outside the academy on their eco-maps to show their involvement in or commitment to those communities or spaces. The other two talked in depth about their involvement in deaf spaces and communities in the interview, explaining where they located themselves within those spaces and communities.

Some participants reported feeling an obligation to use their work to help deaf and hearing communities understand one another, or to use their position to act as conduits for information between the academy and deaf communities –

*It is hard sometimes, but the advantage of occupying this liminal space is that I can try and help the deaf and hearing communities understand each other through my work, to help the deaf community educate the hearing community. So I feel like I should make the best of it, use my special position between the two.*

*It has always been important to me to be a good deaf person and a good academic, and make sure that information passes between those two worlds.*

However, this was not a simple relationship to negotiate. Not only did this obligation to share information with deaf communities and organisations demand investment of compulsive time, it also sometimes made them question where their loyalties lay –

*At the same time, I feel like I have a responsibility to do research and use that research. But if you ask me how I feel inside about being part of an academic community... If you're talking about a small team, that's fine. It's got its own struggles, but that's fine. But talk about on an institutional level? I feel... I struggle to connect to the institution.*

The participant above tried to resolve the tension by emphasising potential benefit to deaf people and communities, recognising the need to undertake roles in HEIs as part of that wider picture. Another participant felt pulled in the opposite direction, feeling that their involvement in HE had coloured deaf people's perception of them to the extent that they no longer felt comfortable maintaining close ties with their local deaf community.

A lot of this tension seemed to come from a perceived conflict of loyalties or interests between deaf communities and the academy. Many academics feel tension between the university and their local communities, whether they are 'of' or 'in' their local communities (Bond and Paterson 2005). This is not the first time such conflicts of loyalty have been reported in deaf academics (see, for example, De Meulder 2017, O'Brien 2017, O'Brien and Emery 2014, McDermid 2009). Deaf academics who keep one foot in both the academic and the deaf worlds are always expected to negotiate the demands of their job with the requirements of their cultural belonging, and this negotiation takes both time and emotional energy. By residing in, almost, two worlds at once, deaf academics need to bring the knowledge, the values and the cultures of each place into balance. While the two (or more) 'places' of the university and the academics' deaf communities may not be geographically distant, as 'experiential places' (Greenwood 2018, p.138) they are very different.

References to the difficulty of negotiating these two experiential places were scattered throughout the interviews –

*...we work in two languages. I was exhausted... making the effort to approach people, not being sure what that person's attitude will be like... You can't switch off those worries, they're always running through your mind.*

*I think that's where we have a little bit of a conflict of the deaf world values, where you share information, and the values of the academic world. They don't sit well with one another.*

*We, deaf people, have to be careful. We need to consider who has our best interests at heart.*

*I feel guilty sometimes, it can be hard... I feel sometimes I don't do enough for [my community], I could do more, I could do better.*

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Using eco-maps to structure interviews was a very useful tool to not only make a visual record of the deaf academics' musings on their place in their HEI and wider academic networks, but also as a source of data. The order in which items were placed on the map were significant, with participants discussing which element of their networks to include first. All of this added to a much deeper and more reflective interview than might otherwise have been the case. Eco-maps are particularly suited to research with deaf people, for reasons explored above. They could also be particularly suited to research with members of other language minority groups, or members of cultures who place value on narrative styles of information sharing, as they offer a subtle way of structuring relatively unstructured interviews. As such they may be well suited to research with HEI staff from linguistic minority groups.

Eco-maps contain a huge amount of identifying information in the style, the handwriting and overall structure, not to mention the content, of their creation. Therefore, it is difficult to share the map, or sections of the map because to do so can put participants at risk of being identified. It is not only that the identity of the participant must be protected, but also the identity of their colleagues and workplaces. The ethical principle to do no harm (Vanclay, Baines and Taylor 2013) to research participants demands that much of this material must be removed before maps can be shared.

Many deaf academics feel ambiguous about their position in the wider academy, and in their own HEIs specifically. It seems odd that academics should be left to feel such ambiguity, or to feel that they do not have strong academic ties to their home HEIs. In the current academic environment centralised funding from the UK government increasingly relies on the performance of individual academics in the REF and TEF. If HEIs are at risk of losing their talent to rivals, surely, they should be doing more to make academics feel valued. Research suggests that academics value mentoring relationships within their own institutions (Robinson, Ratle and Bristow 2017, Weijden et al. 2015) and that the most valued sort of interaction between academic peers is ‘face-to-face... unprogrammed encounters’ (Toker and Gray 2008) which seem to be largely inaccessible for the deaf academics interviewed for this project.

A particularly important consideration in the workplace is access to what has been called ‘critical corridor talk’ (Jameson 2018). This is defined as a ‘serious, important form of counter-discourse that enables relief’ for academic staff who feel ‘undervalued, marginalised, overworked and poorly treated’ (ibid 386). This is a source of support, resistance and information for academics, but happens only ‘spontaneously and unexpectedly’ (ibid 378). If it is spontaneous and unexpected, it is not something that deaf academics can plan in their interpreter booking schedule. As a result, they miss out on involvement in potentially

valuable counter-discourses which could enable them to fight for greater inclusion and involvement in their HEI.

The compulsive time that deaf academics spend making their own jobs accessible in various ways eats into the pledged time and their leisure time. This can place an unduly heavy and unpaid burden on their shoulders. HEIs need to do more to minimise the sort of compulsive time deaf academics have to spend on accessibility and allow them to focus on their academic work. More effective institutional support is essential in ensuring that more deaf people can bring their unique contributions to Higher Education.

These issues are not only faced by deaf academics. Booking support to access the workplace is something that many disabled academics must do on top of their paid, contracted hours. Accessing informal, spoken ‘corridor talk’ can be difficult for those whose first language is not the dominant language in their HEI. These academics can feel overburdened, isolated and cut off in a similar fashion to the deaf academics in this research. Implications for the inclusion and support of disabled and linguistic/cultural minority groups into HEI institutions can be drawn from this paper.

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