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Sign Language Interpreter-Mediated Qualitative Interview with Deaf Participants in Ghana: Some Methodological Reflections for Practice

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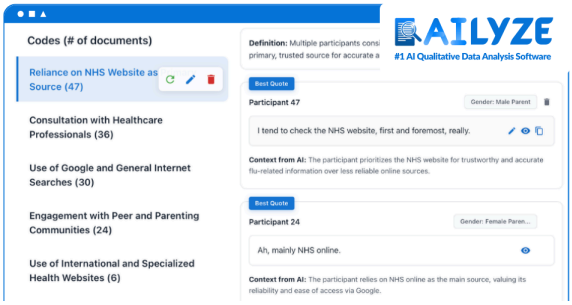

Sign Language Interpreter-Mediated Qualitative Interview with Deaf Participants in Ghana: Some Methodological Reflections for Practice

Abstract

Qualitative research is adventurous and creative, and committed to understanding unique human experiences in specific cultural ecologies. Qualitative interviewing with Deaf participants is far more challenging for hearing researchers who do not understand sign language, and for this reason such interactions may require the use of a sign language interpreter to facilitate the interview process. However, the quality of sign language interpreter-mediated interactions is likely to be compromised due to omissions, oversights, misinterpretations or additions that may occur during translation. An unthoughtful and poor interpretation of a communicative event by a sign language interpreter during a qualitative interview with Deaf participants may lead to an imposition of the interpreter's or the researcher's realities on Deaf participants' lived experiences. It is thus important that qualitative researchers who conduct sign language interpreter-mediated interviews with Deaf participants employ practical and flexible ways to enhance such interactions. To understand the everyday realities of Deaf people amid the Covid-19 pandemic in Ghana, and document same to inform policy and practice, we conducted qualitative interviews with Deaf participants in Ghana. In this article, we draw insights from our data collection experiences with Deaf participants in Ghana to offer some useful methodological reflections for minimizing omissions in sign language-mediated qualitative interviews and thereby enhancing qualitative data quality. We particularly discuss how qualitative researchers can use language flexibility and post-interview informal conversations with a sign language interpreter to create a natural non-formal interactional atmosphere that engenders natural conversational flow to minimize interpretation omissions and differential power relations in sign language interpreter-mediated qualitative interviews with Deaf participants.

Keywords

Qualitative interview, Deaf participants, Interpreter mediated-communication, Sign language, language flexibility, Interpretation omissions, Ghana

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Qualitative research is adventurous and creative, and committed to understanding unique human experiences in specific cultural ecologies. Qualitative interviewing with Deaf participants is far more challenging for hearing researchers who do not understand sign language, and for this reason such interactions may require the use of a sign language interpreter to facilitate the interview process. However, the quality of sign language interpreter-mediated interactions is likely to be compromised due to omissions, oversights, misinterpretations or additions that may occur during translation. An unthoughtful and poor interpretation of a communicative event by a sign language interpreter during a qualitative interview with Deaf participants may lead to an imposition of the interpreter's or the researcher's realities on Deaf participants' lived experiences. It is thus important that qualitative researchers who conduct sign language interpreter-mediated interviews with Deaf participants employ practical and flexible ways to enhance such interactions. To understand the everyday realities of Deaf people amid the Covid-19 pandemic in Ghana, and document same to inform policy and practice, we conducted qualitative interviews with Deaf participants in Ghana. In this article, we draw insights from our data collection experiences with Deaf participants in Ghana to offer some useful methodological reflections for minimizing omissions in sign language-mediated qualitative interviews and thereby enhancing qualitative data quality. We particularly discuss how qualitative researchers can use language flexibility and post-interview informal conversations with a sign language interpreter to create a natural non-formal interactional atmosphere that engenders natural conversational flow to minimize interpretation omissions and differential power relations in sign language interpreter-mediated qualitative interviews with Deaf participants.

Keywords: Qualitative interview, Deaf participants, Interpreter mediated-communication, Sign language, language flexibility, Interpretation omissions, Ghana

In recent years, qualitative methodologies are increasingly becoming ubiquitous and influential approaches within the social and behavioural sciences. Qualitative research methodologies have moved from the margins to become established mainstream approach to the study of psychological and social issues (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2008). Fundamentally, qualitative research is committed to the experiential perspectives and interpretive understanding of human experience (Adjei & Mpiani, 2020), and thus aims at interrogating "subjectivity and intentional actions and experiences embedded in real life contexts" (Adjei & Mpiani, 2018, p. 934). To broaden the scope of research, recent studies have emphasized the need for the broader scientific research community to employ practical and creative ways to include linguistically and culturally sensitive research methodologies for studying marginalised groups such as Deaf participants (Anderson et al., 2018; Singleton et al., 2014). Thus, to remain a relevant and recognised site for knowledge production, the frontiers of qualitative methodologies need to be expanded and qualitative research practitioners need to adopt practical ways of data collection and analysis. This should include reflective practices that allow for the collection and analysis of qualitative data from marginalised and minority groups, such as the Deaf community, so that the everyday realities and experiences of Deaf people can be documented to inform policy and practice. In a culturally and linguistically diverse society, such reflective practices can significantly impact research and policy efforts that aim at reducing communication barriers of Deaf people in order to improve their access to vital information about primary health care, banking and other important economic and social activities in society.

There could be a number of ways by which Deaf people can creatively communicate and exercise their agency, especially for simple transactional purposes (Kusters, 2017). For example, they may utilize creative means such as iconic gestures, facial expressions, pointing and writing down words to make themselves understood to hearing people (Kusters et al., 2017). However, when Deaf people are involved in situations that require in-depth communication such as consultations with health professionals and job interview situations (Napier et al., 2018) or the exercise of professional roles in the workplace (Hauser et al., 2008), their preferred mode of communication in most countries is through the use of sign language interpreters and translators (Young et al., 2019). In Ghana, Deaf people mostly rely on sign language and interpreter-mediated communication to understand and to be understood by hearing, non-signing people.

Sign language is visual, gestural or manual (Skelton & Valentine, 2003; Temple & Young, 2004) or visual tactile with no standardized written or print form (Anderson et al., 2018; Temple & Young, 2004), and the art of communicating and comprehending it requires extensive contact with sign language users (Porter, 1999). A critical concern of all professionals conducting studies with, and about Deaf people must be the accurate and realistic representation of the experiences and issues that affect them (Benedict & Sass-Lehrer, 2007). Imposed attempts at representing the daily experiences of the Deaf community could be detrimental and irrelevant to their realities. Sign language interpreters that are involved in qualitative data collection thus have the responsibility to provide interpretations that are linguistically and culturally sensitive, incorporating meaning equivalents, while providing Deaf people the opportunity to access specialized terminologies that may be necessary to understand the subject matter (Napier, 2004; Young & Hunt, 2011). Sign language interpreter-mediated interactions may be both beneficial and challenging to hearing and Deaf people. For

example, they may serve as positive forms of access to communication (Young et al., 2019), and increase the confidence in facilitating a two-way interaction between persons who are deaf and hearing people that are unable to sign. Simultaneously, such interactions provide an impression to Deaf people that their mode of communication is socially accepted (Napier, 2011). They may also be challenging because of the uniqueness of sign language, and the fact that sign language interpreter-mediated interactional settings may (re)produce everyday relations of power in society, in which the Deaf participants may be assumed to be the weak minority and the hearing individuals regarded as the strong majority, even without them being aware of it (Levinger, 2020; Temple & Young, 2004; Young et al., 2019). Sign language interpreter-mediated interactions are also problematic because they could lead to the loss of self and agency "for Deaf signers in communicatively performing and projecting their identity (self) because an 'other' has to make choices about how they are represented (i.e. when they sign, someone else – the interpreter – literally speaks for them)" (Young et al., 2019, p. 91).

Given that sign language is a distinct and independent language, and many sign languages around the world differ in syntax and grammatical structure from the spoken language(s) used in those regions (Luey et al., 1995), interviewing Deaf people may be generally challenging for hearing, non-signing researchers. Even when a sign language interpreter is involved at an intermediate level, omissions in interpretation from the hearing, non-signing interviewer or oral/source language to participants (Deaf signers) and from participants' signed language to the hearing interviewer are inevitable (Napier, 2004). To safeguard and enhance the credibility and integrity of qualitative study or interviews with Deaf people through a sign language interpreter, one must adopt careful reflective ways in data collection to minimize omissions in interpretation. Qualitative researchers may adopt a number of strategies to minimize or avoid omissions in interpretations in order to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative data. These strategies may include shared responsibility such as co-working for meaning between interpreters and interviewers, as well as between interpreters and the perspectives of those interviewed in terms of being represented through interpreters.

In this paper, we draw on our data collection experiences with Deaf people in Ghana to demonstrate how such reflective practices as language flexibility and post-interview conversation with a sign language interpreter can effectively work to minimize interpretation omissions in sign language interpreter-mediated qualitative interviews with Deaf participants. This article consists of five main sections. In the first section, we briefly describe the experiences of Deaf people in Ghana to provide relevant context for the paper. The second part involves a discussion on the current status of sign language interpretation omission and presents the problem-statement for the paper, focusing on typologies and complexities of sign language interpretation omissions. The third part describes how we conducted the interview with our Deaf participants, and explains the choices we made to enhance our mediated communications. The fourth section provides our reflections on the methodological choices we made in the interview process and how they helped minimize sign language interpretation omission. We specifically discuss two reflective and practical means: (1) language flexibility and (2) post-interview conversation with a sign language interpreter, which we employed to reduce omissions and enhance data quality and integrity. The fifth section discusses the implication of our reflection for theory and praxis. We then offer some concluding remarks.

Experiences of Deaf people in Ghana

The actual Deaf population in Ghana is inconclusive in the available literature. While the Ghana Statistical Service (2012) reports 211,712 as the total number of Deaf people in Ghana, the Ghana National Association of the Deaf (2021) puts the Deaf population in Ghana at 110,625 (about 0.4% of Ghana's 30 million population). Deaf people in Ghana face a number

of economic, social and psychological challenges. For example, deafness is seen by the hearing majority in Ghana as a disease or a curse, and Deaf people may be pejoratively referred to as *mumu* or *mum* (in the Akan language), tokunor (in Ewe) to offensively signify that they are dumb. As observed by Melander (2008), hearing people in Ghana rarely call Deaf individuals by name, but by a derogatory term instead. It is common for people to often replace the name of a Deaf person with the offensive term *mumu* or *mum* (Oteng, 1988). As a result of the focus on their disabilities, it is usually the case in Ghana that Deaf persons are not known by their real names, even in their immediate communities, but rather by their disabilities. The majority in Ghana perceive deafness as a "negative condition" with a spiritual origin, which is required to be cured, rejected or hidden (Melander, 2008). The negative labels are repeatedly reinforced in Ghana through institutions such as the home and the school (Sam, 2013). Parents and teachers within these institutions encourage Deaf people to reject a positive Deaf identity (Melander, 2008).

Other previous studies have also documented that Deaf people in Ghana are dreaded and shunned (Markides, 1972), and are socially excluded by hearing people as deafness is seen as contagious (Sarkodee, 1983). They are mocked, and hearing people may even compare them to leaf-eating animals such as goats by putting a leaf in the mouth and pretending to chew on it (Oteng, 1988). The social stigma against the Deaf could be so unbearable that parents may reject, hide or overprotect Deaf children in Ghana (Melander, 2008; Sarkodee, 1983). However, other studies in Ghana have reported a more positive perspectives of health professionals working with people with disabilities, including Deaf people (Walker, 1983).

Like many other places in the world, Deaf people in Ghana rely mostly on sign language for communication and survival in most public spaces such as banks, schools, health facilities, etc. Just as there are many spoken languages in Ghana, the Deaf community in Ghana is also linguistically diverse. Available studies indicate that there are four sign languages that are in use by the Deaf community in Ghana (Nyst, 2010). These are the Adamorobe Sign Language (AdaSL), American Sign Language (ASL), Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) and Nanabin Sign Language (Nyst, 2010; Owoo, 2019). The Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) is officially used in schools, and by the majority of Deaf people in Ghana (Owoo, 2019). Though the GSL incorporates some locally constructed signs, it is mainly developed from, and based on, the American Sign Language (Owoo, 2019). The influence of ASL on the sign language ecology in Ghana and West Africa generally is not surprising because Deaf education in Ghana was introduced by an African American Missionary, Reverend Andrew Foster (1927-1987; Nyst, 2010). For example, Ghana's first school for the Deaf was established by Reverend Foster's Christian Mission for the Deaf (CMD) in 1957, the year Ghana gained its independence from the British (Nyst, 2010). In fact, Foster's CMD built nine schools for the Deaf, all of which are currently public schools. As a result of Foster's influence on, and significance for the education of the Deaf in Ghana and West Africa, ASL-based sign languages are the first language of educated Deaf adults in most West African countries (Nyst, 2010).

It is instructive to state that despite the linguistic evidence of the existence of these different sign languages in Ghana, they have not gained formal recognition as Ghana does not have any formalized and official sign language policy (Owoo, 2019). The hearing majority in Ghana are likely to deny that sign language is actually a language, an attitude that compromises Deaf people's linguistic rights and identity, and dehumanizes Deaf people's communication practices. Although section 6 of *Ghana's Person's with Disability Act of 2006* makes it mandatory for service providers to make their facilities accessible to people with disabilities, access to communication and information still remains a major challenge faced by the Deaf community in Ghana, as the majority of public facilities do not have sign language interpreters and translators to facilitate interactions between hearing, non-signers and Deaf people. The

unavailability of sign language interpreters at public spaces and events may partly be due to the limited number of sign language interpreters in Ghana. The non-availability of qualified sign language interpreters in Ghana, and elsewhere, could discourage researchers from trying to investigate and understand the lived experiences of Deaf people in society, and thus makes the methodological reflections we offer in this article very significant for research and practice.

Sign language interpretation omissions

Communication is far more difficult when hearing people, who do not sign, meet Deaf people (Young et al., 2019). For such encounters to succeed and be meaningful, it may require the use of a sign language interpreter to facilitate all interactional exchanges. In such interactional relationships such as qualitative interviews, the quality of communication between a hearing interviewer or researcher (who can neither sign nor understand signed language) and a sign language interpreter; and between the interpreter and Deaf participants in the interview partly depends on the interpreter. In much the same way, the interpreter plays a key role in the quality of communication between the Deaf participants and the interviewer or researcher. If the interpreter, within the interactional relationship triad translates correctly, the channel of communication between the researcher/interviewer and the Deaf participants will open; and if the interpreter fails to interpret accurately or choose not to do so, the channel will close or will be defective (Cornes & Napier, 2005; de Bruin & Brugmans, 2006). Generally, omissions in the interpreting literature have been described as an interpreter's deliberate or accidental failure to include or do something suggested by a speaker in a source language to target audience or vice versa. Such omissions may be conscious or unconscious during sign language interpretations (Napier, 2004).

When sign language interpreters depart from the original message in the source language or text, it was traditionally considered as an error of interpretation (Barik, 1975/2002; Cokely, 1992. This understanding has shifted lately. Previous studies of lecture interpretation into sign language have observed that conscious strategic choices such as additions and omissions are necessary for sign language interpreters to achieve effective interpretations (Winston, 1989). For ease of translation and purpose of conveying meaning in context, a fair share of sign language interpretation omission may be carefully and purposefully intentional. Omissions are sometimes necessary because if information in the source language or text are translated fully, it might distort the meaning of the message (Gile, 2009). Thus, sign language interpreters need to judge the importance of lexical items presented in the source language and decide when it might be appropriate to add or omit information for the sake of clarity and meaning (Napier, 2004).

Based on review of the extant interpreting literature, Napier (2004) delineated five typologies of omission: conscious strategic omissions; conscious intentional omissions; conscious unintentional omissions; conscious receptive omissions; and unconscious omissions. *Conscious strategic omissions* describe those in which the interpreter wilfully decides, based on his/her linguistic and cultural knowledge, which information from the source language makes cultural and linguistic sense in the target language. Whereas *conscious intentional omissions* are those that are willingly done due to the interpreter's inability to find conceptual equivalent in either the spoken or sign language. For *conscious unintentional omissions*, the interpreter is aware of the omission yet he/she has not chosen it. It usually occurs when the interpreter hears a communicated item during interactional context, waits for more contextual information from the source language, and in the process fails to retrieve the particular communicated item due to time lag (Napier, 2004). In Napier's (2004) taxonomy of omissions, *conscious receptive omissions* occur when the interpreter, though aware of the omission, cannot properly decipher the communicated item as a result of poor sound quality.

The final category is *unconscious omission*, in which the interpreter is not aware (conscious) of the omission and does not remember ever hearing the communicated item from the source.

Not all omissions (e.g., strategic omissions) imply poor interpretation and affect or degrade the understanding of the original message from a source language or text (Livingston, et al., 1994). However, interpreting a (sign) visual language into a spoken one is likely to lose some of its complexities, emotions and meanings (Skelton & Valentine, 2003). The question is: how can qualitative researchers who conduct interviews with Deaf participants through the use of sign language interpreters practically reduce the rate of omissions and meaning loss? As indicated earlier, this article offers two practical methodological reflections, based on our experience in a mediated qualitative interview with Deaf participants in Ghana, that could help qualitative researchers to reduce interpretation omissions. Thus, this article is not focused on reporting primary data of our study. Rather, the focus is to provide a reflection on our data collection experiences that can potentially be helpful to enhance the quality and soundness of qualitative interviews with Deaf participants through a sign language interpreter by minimizing differential power relations in sign language interpreter-mediated interactions, and reducing omissions and meaning loss.,.

Interview procedure

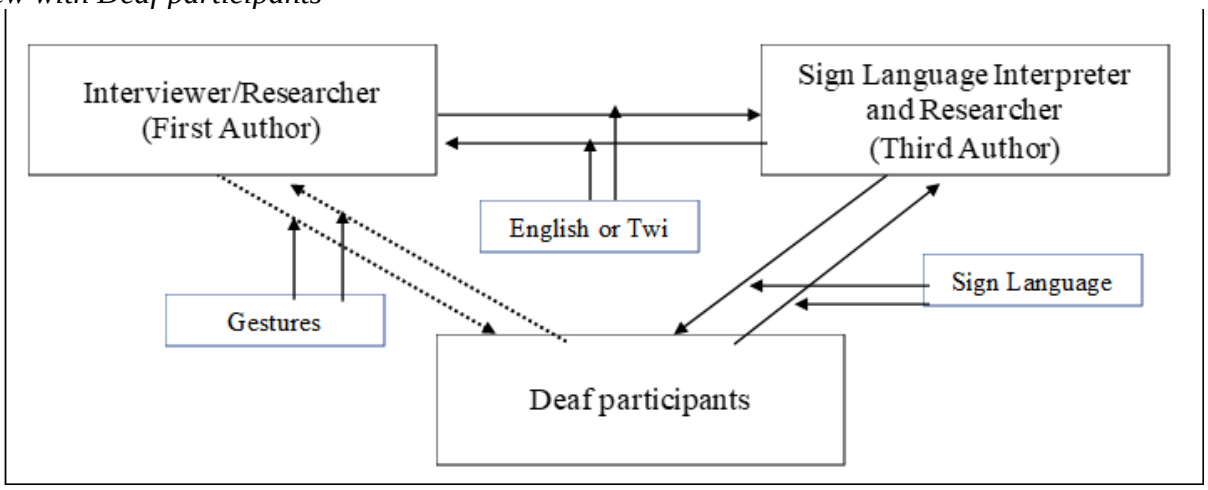
The present study is part of our larger COVID-19 project that explored the lived experiences of children and young people in Ghana (see Gwenzi et al., 2020 for the methodological reflections on the children). In this article, we report only the methodological considerations for the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions conducted with young Deaf high school and university students (n = 8; aged = 19-25 years; 5 males, 3 females), in which a sign language interpreter was involved. With the exception of one post-lingual Deaf, all the participants were pre-lingual Deaf. We conducted the interviews and focus group discussions based on predefined themes or topics. Carefully tailored and predefined thematic areas was preferred and proved beneficial in the sense that it helped both researchers and participants to be more focused, and elicited guided content (Gwenzi et al., 2020). However, the details of which questions were posed, how they were formulated, and the sequence in which they were posed depended on factors related to an individual participant and the interview context (Boeije, 2010). This semi-structured interview format provided both enough structure and sufficient flexibility to ensure that relevant topics were covered and that issues raised by the participants were sufficiently explored (Hersh, 2013).

The solid arrows in Figure 1 represent the communication (either in English or Twi), from the interviewer/first author to the sign language interpreter/third author on one level, and from the interpreter to and from the Deaf participants on another. The two dashed arrows signify non-verbal communication such as facial expressions between the researcher/first author and the Deaf participants. This non-verbal aspect was necessary for two reasons: (1) to communicate to the Deaf participants that the hearing researcher/interviewer was a party to and interested in the conversations, and (2) to provide a conversational interactional relationship/atmosphere important to minimize power differentials in the interview. The interview involved two levels of interpretation as shown in Figure 1. The first level, shown by the two solid arrows pointing to and from the interpreter in Figure 1, involved the first author asking all the questions either in English or Twi, while the second intermediate level (also shown by two solid arrows to and from Deaf participants in Figure 1) involved a Ghanaian hearing sign language expert/interpreter (the third author) communicating or signing (interpreting the questions into sign language) the questions to the participants as well as communicating the participants' responses to the first and the second author in either Twi or English. While English is the official language of Ghana and the language of communication

in schools, for government business, and by a considerable number of people in daily communication, Twi is the most widely spoken Ghanaian language belonging to the Asantes, the largest constituents of the Akan[1]-speaking people of Ghana (Adjei, 2016).

Figure 1

A heuristic model showing the triadic relationship in sign language interpreter-mediated interview with Deaf participants



In addition to tape recording of the oral communication of the interviewer (first author) and the sign language interpreter (third author), we asked the second author to type as many responses of the sign language interpreter's oral communication of the participants' experiences as possible, and make annotations where appropriate. The first and second authors are hearing, non-signing researchers with substantial experience in conducting qualitative interview with hearing participants. The third author is a hearing, sign-fluent academic with vast experience in Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) communication and interpretations. He serves as one of the lead sign language interpreters to the Deaf community in Ghana, and had a prior cordial relationship with our Deaf participants. He once signed for an internationally televised presidential debate in Ghana in 2008, and has been teaching special needs education and sign language at the University level since 2009. Our unique Ghanaian experiences, identities, perspectives and standpoints positively contribute to the current research in diverse ways. For example, our collective contextual knowledge, and the interpreter's understanding of the discursive practices of the participants significantly helped the current study in terms of appreciating specific terminologies, metaphors and concepts deployed by our participants to index a particular normative practice or meaning system embedded in the Ghanaian context. Qualitative data collection and analysis are situated activities (Adjei, 2019) because data are always produced, constructed and mediated by human activities within a given cultural and historical context (Brinkmann, 2014), and thus requires the "implicit cultural knowledge of the context in which the interlocutors are located" to be fully appreciated (Adjei, 2019, p. 2240).

Two methodological reflections

In qualitative studies where data are collected in more than one language and in which the research process involves acts of translation between languages, how the translation is done and who does it has both methodological and epistemological implications (Temple &

[1] Ethnographically, the Akans are the largest polity of Ghana, constituting over 47% of Ghana's population (Ghana Statistical Service 2012).

Young, 2004). Translation in qualitative research is a specific form of interpretation, and therefore the social position, existential experiences and epistemological stances of translators could have important influence on data collection and transformation (Wong & Poon, 2010). The primary goal in such interpreter-mediated data collection exchanges is to minimize omissions to enhance meaningful interpretations. As indicated earlier, there are multiple ways by which qualitative researchers may reduce omissions in interpretations to convey meaning and enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative data. This article offers two methodological reflections that can potentially work to minimize interpretation omissions, and enhance the possibility of conveying meaning in qualitative interviews conducted with Deaf participants through a sign language interpreter. These are language flexibility and post-interview informal conversations with the sign language interpreter.

Language flexibility

As indicated earlier in Figure 1, the two-level interview involved the first author (interviewer) asking the Deaf participants' questions either in English or Twi through a Ghanaian (hearing) sign language interpreter (the third author). We chose to be flexible with the language of the interview conversation between the interviewer and the sign language interpreter for two essential reasons: (1) to give the interview a natural conversational flow to ensure ease of interpretation and (2) to use the conversational flow occasioned by the flexibility of language to manage and minimize sense of power and control in such an interactional triad involving hearing and Deaf participants.

The flexibility of language did not only give the interview a natural conversational flow, but also, and more importantly, it ensured that words or concepts that were hard for the interpreter to readily understand could be conveyed in either English or Twi, as the case may be, to the interviewer. In such interpreter-mediated interactional exchanges, it is important that the interpreter understand the source language message to be able to appropriately sign (interpret it into sign language) for the understanding of the Deaf participants. This is essential because an unthoughtful and poor interpretation of communicative event by a sign language interpreter during qualitative interview with Deaf participants may lead to an imposition of the interpreter's and/or the interviewer's realities on Deaf participants' lived experiences. The availability of the option to ask questions in the Twi or English language or a combination of both ensured that the interpreter sufficiently understood the message of the communication from the source/interviewer. In addition, it offered the interpreter the flexibility to communicate to the interviewer and to deal with the interpreter's inability to find a conceptual equivalent of the sign language from the participants. Research shows that an interpreter's inability to decipher a particular lexical item or concept in the source language, and/or retrieve an appropriate and meaningful equivalent in the target language may result in what has been referred to as *conscious intentional omission* (Napier, 2004). While our language flexibility approach may not be an entirely new practice in qualitative and translation studies, it served a useful purpose for the context of the current study. The competence of both interviewer and interpreter in native language (i.e., Twi), and English, and the flexibility to use either of them in conveying the message potentially reduced conscious intentional omissions.

The conversational character of the interview setting that was occasioned by language flexibility also served as additional resource to minimize power differentials that usually characterize interpreter-mediated interactional exchanges between hearing people and Deaf people (Young et al., 2019). In an interpreter-mediated interactional exchange, there is the tendency for hearing people to see the need, ownership and relevance of the interpreter 'for' the Deaf person rather than for all parties involved in the interactional context (Napier, et al., 2018). The conversational aspect of the interview and the active participation of

the sign language interpreter due to his familiarity and prior cordial relationship with participants, and the fact that he was also a member of the research team, created a natural interactional atmosphere and the recognition that both the research team and the participants were in need of, and working with, the interpreter, rather than the interpreter being used by the Deaf participants. The attribution of a sign language interpreter only for Deaf people, in any interactional context involving Deaf and hearing people who do not sign, as well as the belief that the Deaf need the interpreter to be able to communicate with others, transforms interpreters into a signifier of disability (Young et al., 2019).

The experiences of Deaf people as weak minority group, both in the family and in society, affect their individual experiences of life (Lane, 2005; Quittner et al., 2010; Skelton & Valentine, 2003). It is thus suggested that there exist significant relations of power and control within a triad of a hearing researcher who cannot sign, sign language interpreter and Deaf participants, in the interactional context of interviews. Coalitions are likely to be formed within such an interactional triad (Tribe & Thompson, 2009) in which the hearing and Deaf people involved in the triad may replicate the everyday experiences of power relations in the family and society in the interactional space. In addition, significant relations of power may develop between the researcher/interviewer and the Deaf participants; between the Deaf participants and the interpreter without any connection to the interviewer; and between the interpreter and the Deaf participants (see Britton, 2004; Levinger, 2020). In this triadic relation of power, the hearing people (the interviewer and the interpreter) perhaps without being aware of it, may assume their usual places in society in this interactional context, in which the Deaf participants may be on the side of the weak minority and the hearing individuals on the side of the strong majority (Levinger, 2020). This may deprive Deaf participants of the opportunity to feel empowered by telling their stories and sharing their unique experiences. It should thus be the concern of qualitative researchers who conduct interviews with Deaf people through the use of a sign language interpreter to strive to establish a good rapport with Deaf participants and to create positive relational settings through the use of language flexibility to overpower societal structures that constantly (re)produce power differentials in sign language-mediated interview situations.

It is however worth noting that the flexibility of language may not be an available option for interpreters and researchers who cannot both speak two languages or who may have variations in the level of competence in two languages. For our study, we had the luxury of both the interviewer/researcher and the sign language interpreter being able to understand and communicate in both the local/native Twi (both the interviewer and the sign language interpreter are native speakers of Twi) and English languages, with a sufficiently proportionate level of competence and fluency. It is therefore important for researchers to strive to find and include co-investigators or research assistants from the communities of their research interests. Despite the constraints of limited resources for research, Wong and Poon (2010) have advised that it is necessary for social science researchers to reconceptualize cross-cultural studies to include co-investigators and research assistants from the communities of the research interest. Though very difficult and sometimes not possible, constituting a linguistically and culturally congruent research team for data collection and analysis may be important for minimizing interpretation omissions and improving the rigour of qualitative research.

Post-interview informal conversation with the sign language interpreter

It has been observed that, though hearing people who are versed in sign language tend to have a relatively good command of the signed communication, their signing may be influenced by the structure of their spoken language (Nyst, 2010). Generally, interpreters in a mediated communication are imbued with powers of representation and portrayal of those (the

triad) involved in the exchanges (Young et al., 2019). For example, the interpreter's tone of voice, lexical choices, register and their multiple identities such as gender, culture and race all convey meaning either explicitly or implicitly (Young, et al., 2019). This makes it necessary for researchers in a mediated communication to further engage interpreters to understand the choices they make for the parties involved, and how they represent the Deaf signers/participants and the hearing non-signer/interviewer in such mediated interactions. As Young et al. (2019) have pointed out, the sign language interpreter is not merely an arbiter of linguistic content in a mediated exchange; they have powers of representation and portrayals of the persons involved in such interactions.

To potentially reduce interpretation omissions and improve upon epistemological outcomes of our study, we engaged the sign language interpreter in a post-interview informal conversation. Immediately after each interview session, we (the first and the second authors) engaged the sign language interpreter (the third author) in informal but purposeful conversation to understand the frequency of omissions and types as well as the situational context of such omissions and additions. We refer to our post-interview interactions with the sign language interpreter as informal because our interactions were not carefully planned or regulated by any known conversational protocols. The post-interview conversation with the interpreter is similar to reflexivity, which is inherent in most qualitative conventions. Working reflexively is particularly recommended as it optimizes and forms part of the energy and momentum of qualitative teamwork (Barry et al., 1999). The informal conversation was also meant to allow the sign language interpreter to retrospectively reflect on the interview process, indicate omissions in his interpretations, if any, and explain why the omission occurred as well as the extent to which such omissions may have affected meaning in the context of the interview. This was done to obtain insights into the perceptions of the interpreter; how his social positions, lived experiences and epistemological positions may have influenced his choice of words; and to understand whether omissions that occurred were consciously occasioned or not. For example, we asked the interpreter to describe the part of the interview that went well; the part that was particularly difficult to sign and why; whether or not there was omission in interpretation; why he thought the omission had occurred; and whether or not he was conscious of the omission. This process may also be similar to what has been described as task review or task tracing (Moser-Mercer, 1997; Napier, 2004) or retrospective interview techniques (Hoffman, 1997), in which a researcher takes a subject of a study or an interpreter through an interview or interpreting task the second time. Previous studies have used task tracing or review process and retrospective interview to study omissions in sign language interpretations in which the sign language interpreters were participants of the study (Kauling, 2015; Napier, 2004).

Generally, we discovered, during such post-interview conversation with the interpreter, that interpretation omissions were minimal and were mostly concerned with strategic and conscious intentional omissions. In one such instance of conscious intentional omission, the first author/interviewer during the interview with participants asked a question about the challenges faced by the Deaf people during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana. The interpreter signed "having" instead of "facing" a challenge. The post-lingual participant who had read "facing" a challenge from the interviewer's lip contested the "having" interpretation signed to him by the interpreter. The interpreter then explained that, within the context of the communication, signing "having" was the most appropriate conceptual equivalent to help the Deaf participants understand the communicative event. This is one instance to show that, employing post-interview conversation with our sign language interpreter allowed us to extract relevant information about the interview situation to appreciate the type and rate of interpretation omissions. This extraction occurred regardless of our use of such conversations informally, as compared to how previous studies used task tracing and retrospective interview

(e.g., Kauling, 2015; Napier, 2004). Such reflexive exercises have always been invaluable to qualitative research because, in such studies, the researcher is not a detached spectator but part of both context and the social phenomenon being studied (Schwandt, 1997). Thus, using post-interview conversation concurrently with data collection has the potential to enhance the quality of analysis, interpretations, and findings of qualitative studies, as it enables researchers to immediately reflect on, and capture the reasons for sign language interpretation omissions in order to make the right (mental) connections with participants' responses.

The post-interview conversation with the sign language interpreter potentially helped to improve not only the quality of the data collected, but also, and more importantly, the trustworthiness of the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). The post-interview reflection was a useful tool that ensured greater disclosure necessary to assist researchers in conducting trustworthy studies. The informal conversation with the sign language interpreter immediately after interview sessions also afforded us the opportunity to appreciate the context of omissions and additions, and to make appropriate annotations about the circumstances of these omissions for data analysis, interpretation and conceptual formulations. The context of situation has been observed as a significant factor in language use and interpretation (Cokely, 1992; Napier, 2004). For example, researchers' awareness of the environmental and extralinguistic settings of interpretations, and the purpose that may have influenced a sign language interpreter's decision to add and substitute greatly enhances the theoretical and conceptual formulations and interpretations assigned to a communicative behaviour or event during data analysis. Previous studies have noted that the study of language use and interpretation cannot be separated from the context in which interactions take place (Adjei, 2013, 2019; Napier, 2004) and the interactive outcomes of sign language interpretations may be influenced by such interactional factors as setting and purpose of interpretation (Cokely, 1992).

Implications of our reflexive experiences for theory and praxis

As the theory and practice of qualitative research methodologies become increasingly recognised and valued, they require thoughtful and practical approaches that are linguistically and culturally sensitive for expanding its frontiers to include marginalised groups such as the Deaf community. Language flexibility has positive implications for minimizing the power imbalances which are common in a triadic interactional relationship involving researchers and marginalised groups. In the interactional triad (involving a hearing interviewer/researcher who can neither sign nor understand signed language, sign language interpreter and Deaf participants), effective communication between the interviewer and the Deaf participants significantly rests on the interpreter. This dependency may occasion a sense of great power and control on the part of the interpreter within the interview space (Levinger, 2020). However, the exercise of this power and control may also be dependent on the atmosphere of the interview setting and/or the kind of relationship that should exist between the interviewer/researcher and the interpreter on one hand, and between the interpreter and the Deaf participants on the other. A more rigid and formal relationship among the members of the triad may reproduce everyday power relations between hearing people and Deaf people, with the potential to significantly affect the quality of the communication in the interview space. The researcher's careful skill in engendering a natural conversational interview within a purposeful but non-formal interview atmosphere may significantly reduce the sense of power and control that is implicit in such interview situations. Research is not solely and always done with and about people who are culturally, politically and linguistically similar to researchers. It is important, therefore, for researchers (particularly hearing, non-signing researchers) to understand that rigidly following prescribed methodological recipes and protocols in studies involving Deaf participants may

result in participants' voice and unique experiences being overshadowed by the sign language interpreter's and/or the researcher's "expert" view.

A thoughtful use of post-interview reflexive practice will most likely have a positive impact on both practice and theoretical knowledge of qualitative researchers. Such critical post-interview reflexive conversational engagement allows researchers to continually question "the taken-for-granted assumptions and blind spots in their own social culture, research community and language" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 9), and help researchers to uncover their own biases, theoretical pre-dispositions and preferences. Team reflexivity in qualitative research, in which there is a sharing of reflexive accounts of personal agendas and hidden assumptions, as well as group discussions about issues arising out of fieldwork, can work to both "improve the productivity and functioning of qualitative teams and the rigor and quality of the research" (Barry et al., 1999, p. 26). The process of working reflexively as a team also has an important epistemological benefit of revealing the unconscious and unexpressed understandings of both the interviewer and the interpreter, and thereby encouraging greater insight into personal, contextual and situational perspectives that provide explicit direction to data analysis, interpretations and conceptual formulations. For this reason, fieldworkers working within the tradition of qualitative inquiry are encouraged to record and explore their evolving dispositions in personal notes in their field journals (Schwandt, 1997). Collaborative reflexive working, such as post-interview team discussions, is significant for enriching the quality and rigour of qualitative studies. Given the dual role of the interpreter (i.e., interpreter/researcher) in the current study, and his privileged position as belonging to the majority hearing group and yet performing interpretation on behalf of the minority group of Deaf participants, the resulting communicative event and linguistic message during the interview may have been defined and produced through the framework of the interpreter's hearing experiences and culture. Thus, when researchers engage sign language interpreters in a post-interview reflexive conversation, they are able to gain further insights in terms of how the interpreter's identity, experiences, attitude and belief systems influence their understanding of the originally communicated message as well as the choice of vocabulary items and grammatical expressions utilized during the interpretation.

Conclusion

Qualitative research is increasingly becoming vital for exploring social and psychological issues in specific cultural spaces, with the aim of gaining an interpretive understanding of specific human experiences. This important epistemological standpoint of qualitative studies demands that researchers employ practical and flexible data collection methodologies, particularly when investigating marginalized and minority groups such as Deaf people, to ensure data quality and integrity. In this paper, we have discussed two important methodological considerations that we find appropriate to minimize interpretation omissions and potential meaning loss that characterize sign language-mediated qualitative interview with Deaf participants. These reflections, we believe, do not only provide some heuristic guidelines for improving the trustworthiness of a two-level sign language-mediated qualitative interview, but also help to clearly delineate their implications for flexible but thoughtful qualitative research and practice. There is a methodological and epistemological utility that qualitative researchers and their participants may derive from the flexibility of language in interviewing situations, particularly those involving Deaf participants and a sign language interpreter.

There should always be room for flexibility and thoughtful practices in qualitative interviews with marginalized and minority groups such as Deaf people in order to offer them the opportunity to be empowered by telling their stories and to accurately illuminate their undiluted experiences. However, for effective task tracing, retrospective or post-interview

conversation and team reflexivity with sign language interpreters, we recommend video-taping of interviews with Deaf participants, which we were unable to do due to logistical constraint. This recommendation is in line with the observation of Anderson et al. (2018) that visual recording of interviews with Deaf participants is useful to document and analyze visual cues, considering the visual nature of sign language. Leveraging video technology in qualitative data collection and analysis will help to significantly minimize the translation biases and interpretation omissions that are commonplace in research involving Deaf participants, and aid in accurately representing the experiences of the Deaf community. Video-taping interviews will also allow an independent sign language interpreter to analyze and assess the data, and the interpretations made of them, by the first interpreter during the interview, and thus offer a degree of external quality control, as well as increasing the credibility of the data and the interpretations made of them.

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