



TEACHING YOGA FOR DEAF PEOPLE MEDIATED BY LIBRAS INTERPRETING

Tarcisio de Arantes Leite

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
tdaleite@gmail.com

Monica Auga Dias Leite

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
monicaauga@gmail.com

Abstract

Objective: our goal is to present what we have learned from our experience of teaching yoga to deaf students through the intermediation of sign language interpreting. Method: in 2019, working within an action-research framework, we held weekly yoga sessions conducted by a Portuguese-speaking instructor assisted by a Libras interpreter. As challenges were encountered, they were reflected upon, and alternatives were adopted in subsequent sessions. Results: issues which required adjustments were: the creation of signs for postures; the positioning of the teacher and interpreter for greater visibility; demands on the visual attention of students; strategies for the direct interaction between the instructor and deaf learners; the synchronization of postures; and the practice of oral mantras. Conclusion: although interpreting and linguistic issues were as expected a crucial concern in developing the classes, our experience revealed that adapting yoga teaching methods to a deaf public also brings into relief perceptual and identity considerations.

Key words: Yoga; Sign Language; Libras Interpreting; Deafness; Hearing Loss.

O ENSINO DE YOGA PARA PESSOAS SURDAS MEDIADO POR INTERPRETAÇÃO EM LIBRAS

Resumo

Objetivo: apresentar as reflexões emergentes em uma experiência de ensino de yoga para pessoas surdas mediada por interpretação na Língua Brasileira de Sinais (Libras). Método: em 2019, seguindo um modelo de pesquisa-ação, promovemos práticas de yoga com uma professora falante de português apoiada por um intérprete de Libras. Na medida em que desafios eram encontrados, refletíamos sobre eles e experimentávamos alternativas em aulas subsequentes. Resultados: questões que exigiram adequações foram: a criação de sinais para posturas; o posicionamento da professora para favorecer sua visibilidade; demandas sobre a atenção visual dos alunos; estratégias para a interação direta entre a professora e os alunos; a sincronização das posturas; e a prática de mantras orais. Conclusão: embora a interpretação em Libras tenha se mostrado crucial para o desenvolvimento das aulas, nossa experiência revelou que a adaptação do ensino do yoga para pessoas surdas suscita não apenas considerações tradutórias/linguísticas, mas também perceptuais e identitárias.

Palavras-chave: Yoga; Língua de Sinais; Interpretação em Libras; Surdez; Deficiência Auditiva.

LA ENSEÑANZA DE YOGA PARA SORDOS MEDIADA POR INTERPRETACIÓN EN LIBRAS

Resumen

Objetivo: presentar reflexiones emergentes en una experiencia de enseñanza de yoga para sordos mediada por la interpretación en Lengua de Señas Brasileña (Libras). Método: en 2019, siguiendo un modelo de investigación-acción, promovimos prácticas de yoga con una profesora de habla portuguesa apoyado por un intérprete de Libras. A medida que se encontraron desafíos, reflexionamos sobre ellos y experimentamos con alternativas en clases posteriores. Resultados: los temas que requirieron ajustes fueron: la creación de señas para posturas; la posición de la maestra para favorecer su visibilidad; demandas de atención visual de los estudiantes; estrategias para la interacción directa entre profesora y alumnos; la sincronización de posturas; y la práctica de mantras orales. Conclusión: aunque la interpretación en Libras ha resultado crucial para el desarrollo de las clases, nuestra experiencia reveló que la adaptación de la enseñanza del yoga para sordos plantea no solo consideraciones traslacionales/linguísticas, sino también perceptivas y de identidad.

Palabras clave: Yoga; Lengua de Señas; Interpretación en Libras; Sordera; Pérdida de la Audición.



INTRODUCTION

Yoga is a millenary tradition developed in the Indian continent many centuries before the Common Era and started to spread to the West mainly from the 20th century on. It is a sophisticated system which involves different dimensions of human experience: physical, mental, emotional, cultural, and spiritual. In the West, within secular contexts, yoga practices also became an object of study in the academic field, corroborating by means of scientific research (e.g., BARROS *et al.*, 2014; RODRIGUES, 2006) what practitioners report based on their own experience; that is, a progressive improvement in one's physical, mental, and emotional health.

Even though there are several different traditions and designations related to yoga, the more popular in our western culture involves performing postures, or *asanas*. The yoga practices offered to the deaf public in our project followed those lines, particularly the tradition of Iyengar Yoga school, in which the teacher of our project, Monica Auga, was trained. As to the practice of asanas, the master who gave birth to this school – B. K. S. Iyengar – describes its effects on human health in the following way:

Asana brings steadiness, health, and lightness to the limbs. A steady and pleasant posture produces mental equilibrium and prevents fickleness of mind. Asanas are not merely gymnastic exercises; they are postures (...) [they] have been evolved over the centuries ~~so as~~ to exercise every muscle, nerve or gland in the body. They secure a fine physique, which is strong and elastic without being muscle-bound, and they keep the body free from disease. They reduce fatigue and soothe the nerves. But their real importance lies in the way they train and discipline the mind (IYENGAR, 2016, p. 44)

However, even though the importance of yoga has been recognized for many decades in the West, its philosophy and practice is hardly known among the Brazilian deaf community, given the lack of deaf yoga teachers and/or hearing teachers proficient in Brazilian Sign Language (Libras), so that they might incorporate it as the language of instruction in yoga classes. Taking that context into consideration, the present extension project offered yoga practices to deaf people mediated by Libras interpreting, in an experimental and reflexive manner. The purpose of this report, therefore, is to present what we have learned from our experience in the year of 2019, the first one in the development of our project.¹

¹ The yoga practices discussed here are part of a wider project, called 'Yoga and meditation for all' (*Yoga e meditação para todos*), promoted by the Libras Department of the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). The project also involves practices of meditation in Libras, study groups and translation of written and spoken materials on yoga and meditation to Libras. For more information, visit our Instagram page (@yogaemeditacaoparatodos) and our YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6oUtiDTKPkVwcP-zZFRpYw>).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In 2019, after finding out about the academic activities related to yoga and meditation, I was promoting at the University's Libras Department, our yoga teacher, Monica, a member of the 'Brazilian Iyengar Yoga Association' (*Associação Brasileira de Iyengar Yoga*), contacted me and told me about her motivation to offer yoga practices for ~~the~~ deaf people. We planned a calendar of classes for every Monday, from 3:30 pm to 5:00 pm, and decided I would provide support as a Libras interpreter, since, at that time, Monica was still in her early days of learning Libras. In order to announce the classes, we produced a video with a window for the Libras interpreter and published it in our social media, understanding that online videos in Libras are the main sources of information among the deaf community today. As to where the classes took place, we reserved a room run by the public servers of the University's Center of Philosophy and Human Sciences. All the materials used during the practices (that is, mats, wood blocks, chairs) were borrowed by another extension project in the university, the 'Yoga Extension Project' (*Projeto Yoga Extensão*), which also used this same room for their classes.

The experimental practices were developed following the logic of an action-research methodology (TRIPP, 2005), with weekly cycles of planning, conducting, and then evaluating our practices. We began discussing and trying to anticipate potential issues that yoga classes for deaf students might raise, compared to classes for hearing students with whom Monica was already used to work – and bearing in mind the specificities of the Iyengar Yoga method -adopted by her. Then, classes were conducted by Monica and our reflections about the experience, both from the perspective of Libras interpreting and the perspective of yoga teaching, were documented either in written or audio format. These reflections would then become the starting point for seeking new interpreting and/or teaching strategies in the subsequent classes, or else to consolidate solutions which seemed to be working well.

RESULTS AND ANALYSES

FIRST CYCLE OF YOGA PRACTICES FOR DEAF STUDENTS

The first experience we had in teaching yoga to deaf students took place between May 6th and 27th, 2019. We would like to point out three reflections out of this experience: (a) the practice of vocalizing mantras among deaf students; (b) the emergence of technical signs for the yoga practice; (c) teacher and students' positioning in the classroom.

Is vocalizing mantras pertinent for deaf people?

Before we begin the first cycle of practices, Monica and I reflected on how her yoga classes were traditionally conducted by her (a hearing person), and what initial adaptations we might anticipate for deaf students. A first issue brought up by Monica was related to mantras' intonation.

Every Iyengar Yoga class begins with the practice of *aum* mantra, followed by invocation to Patanjali.² Monica and I shared the view that the invocation would not make sense in deaf peoples' experience, both because it is in Sanskrit and because it requires a complex vocal recitation.³ Reflecting about the *aum* mantra, on the other hand, we opted to keep open to the possibility of introducing the practice for the following reasons.

First, differently from the invocation to Patanjali, the mantra *aum* is simple to be vocalized, being formed by three sounds (*a-u-m*), whose articulation is just a transition from the open (*a*), to semi-open (*u*) and finally to the closed mouth (*m*). It thus does not demand any specialized vocal skill. Second, Monica pointed out that this mantra has an important role in the subtle, internal preparation for the practice, and even though the sound dimension might not be perceived by deaf students, they still could feel the proprioceptive dimension and the vibration associated with the vocalization. Finally, we considered that each deaf person has its own unique history with vocal practices, depending on whether they were born deaf or became deaf late in life; on the level of audibility they have (moderately severe, severe, profound); if deafness affects both ears or just one; among other idiosyncrasies. For these reasons, we considered that some deaf students might eventually be interested in these practices.

Thus, we introduced the mantra *aum* in the beginning of the class, initially explaining to the students the reasons that led us to the decision of incorporating the mantra in our class. Then, we counted from 1 to 3 so that we could synchronize our vocalization. We made clear that the practice was not mandatory and that, if they preferred, they could just remain in silence, feeling the vibration produced in the room by others' vocalizations. At the end of this experience,

² Patanjali compiled the millenary wisdom of yoga and condensed it in a small collection of aphorisms, known as the *Yoga Sutras*, around the year 100 of the Common Era.

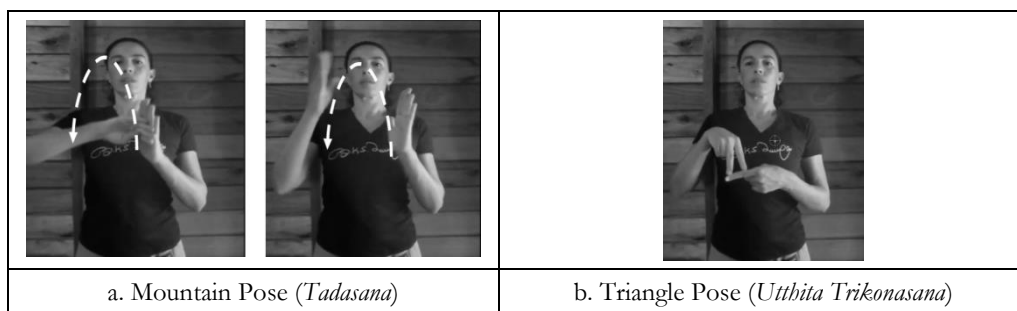
³ We are familiar with the fact that vocalization practices are not generally well received by many deaf people, particularly because of the process called 'oralism' in deaf education (for a critical discussion, see for example, Lacerda, 1998). In the history of the deaf people, the movement in favor of 'oralizing' deaf people traditionally opposed the cultivation of sign languages, assuming that spoken communication in spoken languages were superior to communication in sign languages. Deprived from their language of comfort and submitted to a difficult auditory training of articulating sounds and reading lips, not always followed by good results, many deaf people ended up feeling uncomfortable with practices of vocalization.

most of the students opted to remain in silence, except one of them. In view of that, we remained opened to the possibility of including vocal practices such as this one in future classes.

Developing signs for the yoga practice

In the early weeks of practices, we began to develop an initial repertoire of signs for yoga teaching, some related to the most practiced asanas in these encounters, some to fine body adjustments which constitutes the asana, and which are continually indicated by the teacher, so that students can improve on their posture. In relation to signs for asanas, in several cases we took the meaning of the posture's name as the basis to designate the asana, such as the 'mountain pose' or the 'triangle pose' (Figure 1a and Figure 1b), considering that it would not make sense, at least in this early stage, to introduce the name of asanas by manually spelling them in Sanskrit.

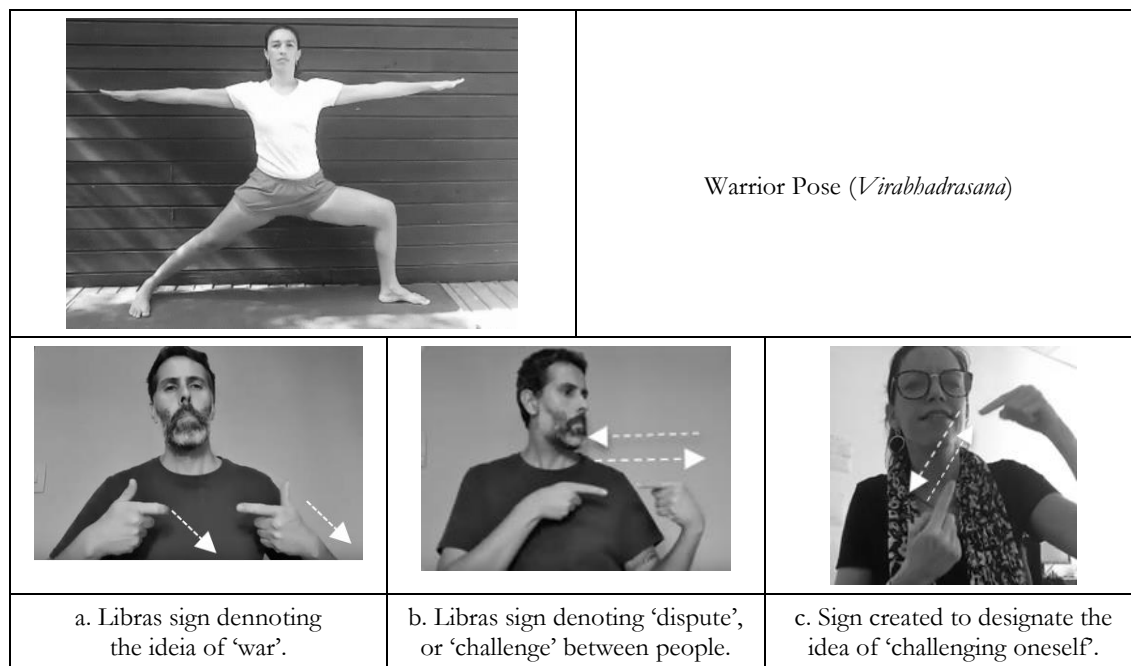
Figure 1. Signs for two asanas practiced in early classes.



Source: Produced by the authors.

A particular concern when translating asanas' names to Libras was to avoid the bias of the conventional associations, we make between Libras signs and Portuguese words, due to the social situation of language contact in the deaf community (Leite et al., 2022). For example, while we were thinking of a sign for the 'warrior pose' (*Virabhadrasana*), the first sign which came up to my mind was the sign presented in Figure 2a, which is associated with notions of 'war'. At the moment of interpreting it, however, I felt this connotation would not be adequate and questioned Monica about it. Confirming my concern, she pointed out that 'warrior' in this context should not suggest a person fighting in wars, but rather someone who stands firm, with open heart and chest, to face one's own internal enemies, thus emphasizing that the goal of yoga is above all to learn about and deal with our inner selves.

Figure 2a. Creation process of a sign for the ‘warrior pose’.



Source: Produced by the authors.

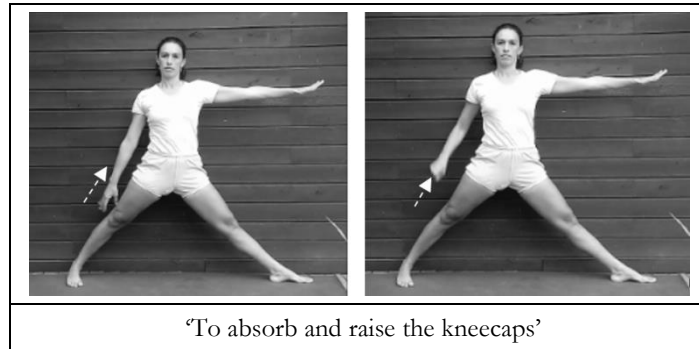
Taking that into account and exploring another sign which denotes the idea of ‘dispute’ and ‘challenge’ rather than ‘war’, a deaf student suggested a creative innovation on the movement parameter of the sign, performing it not outwards (Figure 2b), but directing it towards her own body instead, thus evoking the idea of a challenge that one faces towards his or her own self. Therefore, we always considered the importance of moving beyond simplistic associations between Libras signs and Portuguese words and searching for translations focusing on the function of the signs in the particular communication contexts they are employed (LEITE *et al.*, 2022).

Regarding the signs for body adjustments, sometimes Monica would intuitively explore manual gestures and demonstrations with her body to refer to body actions, such as, for example, the action of ‘absorbing and raising the kneecaps’ (Figure 3). Sometimes, these ‘gestures’ were also offered by deaf students, and when these productions followed the principles of well-formedness of signs in sign languages (BATTISON, 1978)⁴ and were employed regularly in the classes, they would become more conventionalized and thus acquire the status of a specific

⁴ Battison (1978) shows that conventional signs in sign languages cannot be produced in a random way, differently from improvised gesticulations which vary from one situation to another in an ad-hoc way. Just like in any natural language, signs undergo linguistic restrictions that determine how they are structured in different sign languages. Battison argues that signs can be produced with one or two hands. In any case, they explore the repertoire of conventional hand configurations of each specific sign language and, when they involve two hands, they tend to follow the principles he calls ‘symmetry condition’ and ‘dominance condition’. The intuitive gesture presented in Figure 3 is an example of a single-handed manual production that, not violating any principle of well-formedness of signs, has the potential to be established as a conventional linguistic Libras sign, provided it is regularly employed.

Libras ‘sign’, that is, no longer a ‘gesture’ whose form and meaning emerged and is restricted to a single specific communicative situation. This process of lexicalization of gesture (KLIMA and BELLUGI, 1979) was evident when new students joined the group and, in many cases, they would ask us to clarify the meaning of these newly coined terms, still restricted to the context of our classes.

Figure 3. A manual gesture which became a conventional sign in the classes.



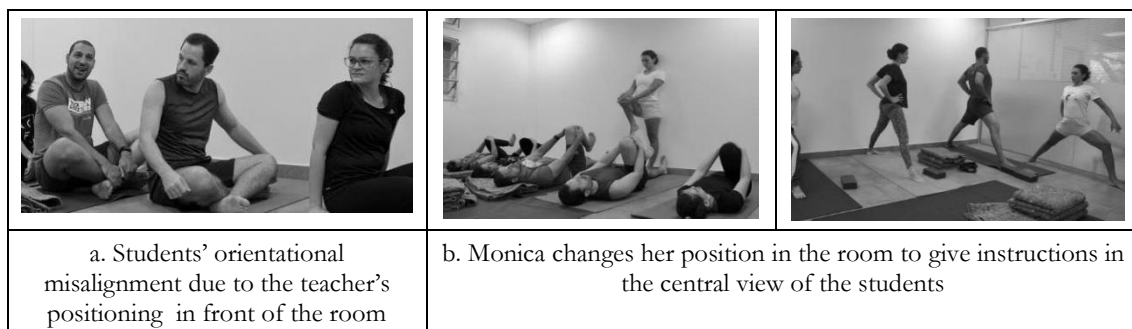
“To absorb and raise the kneecaps”

Source: Produced by the authors.

Positioning of the teacher and the students in the classroom

Regarding the dynamics of the interaction between the teacher and the students, Monica reported her need to move more in the room compared to what she habitually did, to maintain visual contact with deaf students. Out of habit, both Monica and I began the classes by positioning ourselves in front of the class, while students would occasionally perform poses facing another direction. That demanded them to continually misalign their face orientation in order to receive new instructions while practicing the asanas (Figure 4a). Monica and I then started to move more around the room, in such a way that the group could watch the teacher in their central vision (Figure 4b). These dynamics differed from classes with hearing students, which can access the teacher’s instructions through both the visual and the auditory channel.

Figure 4. Positioning of the teacher in the yoga classes.



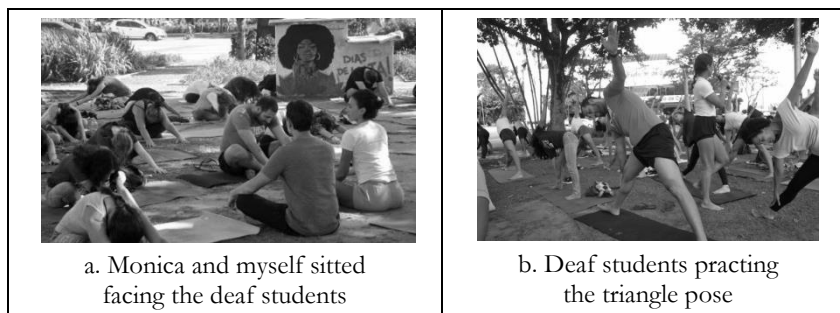
Source: Produced by authors.

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF YOGA OPEN CLASS

An open class took place in celebration of the International Day of Yoga on June 19th, 2019, in front of the building of the Rectory at The Federal University of Santa Catarina. Unlike our first cycle of practices, this open class was not planned with a particular concern for deaf students, because it was offered by a teacher who was not familiar with the deaf community. Knowing this, Monica and I engaged in the class seeking strategies to integrate the dynamics of deaf students with those of the hearing group.

There were two deaf students in this class, one of them had already participated in our early encounters in May, and the other one, was a new student. As the teacher of the open class conducted the group, Monica and I positioned ourselves in front of the deaf students to offer specific orientations to them (Figure 5a).

Figure 5. Deaf students practicing asanas in a class with hearing students.



Source: Produced by the authors.

In that day, it was evident to me the incompatibility between that kind of class, planned for a hearing public, and the deaf public needs. During the class, the teacher would introduce different asanas and, as students performed them, she would occasionally talk about the philosophy behind an asana or yoga in general. At first, I simply interpreted everything the teacher was saying while students were performing the asanas, even the philosophical teachings. At a certain point, however, I realized that demanding their visual orientation and attention to those philosophical reflections, while they were performing the asanas, did not seem to be adequate. My signing was frequently incongruent with the positioning of their bodies (for example, when their face and eyes were horizontally positioned, such as in the 'triangle pose' in Figure 5b) and I felt that my interpretation was withdrawing any possibility for them to direct attention to their posture.

Therefore, I decided to interrupt the interpretation of the teacher's discourse every time the students were engaged in an asana, resuming the translation only in the transitions from one

pose to another, when teacher addressed the students with no asana being performed. I confess, however, that such an option also made me uncomfortable, because it was clear that sometimes I was not doing any interpretation while the teacher was speaking, and as a result I assume the interpretation would often lack coherence for the deaf students. Therefore, the experience of the open class reinforced our perception that we need to continue working separately with the deaf people to understand more deeply their needs, before thinking in how to integrate both deaf and hearing students in a single yoga class, in an egalitarian way.

SECOND CYCLE OF YOGA PRACTICES FOR DEAF STUDENTS

The second experience we had in teaching yoga to deaf students took place between September 16th and December 6th, 2019. We would like to point out three new reflections out of this experience: (a) the search for adapting communicative methods while introducing body adjustments for the students; (b) the synchronization of the beginning and end of asanas by the group ; and (c) our efforts to stimulate the direct interaction between the teacher and deaf students.

Adapting communicative methods to introduce body adjustments

Iyengar Yoga method greatly emphasizes directing the students' attention by verbal means to a series of body actions that must be integrated in the performing of an asana. In classes involving hearing students, the teacher explores both visual and auditory channels in order to fulfill this task. At the same time, she demonstrates the posture to the students with her body, she offers verbal instructions in Portuguese in a complementary way; besides, when students are practicing asanas, they continue to receive (vocal) verbal descriptions from the teacher to perform the necessary body adjustments. Thus, there is a combination of *communicative methods* (CLARK, 1996), which integrates simultaneously the visual channel (i.e. demonstrating the asana) and the auditory channel (i.e. the verbal vocal descriptions referring to the parts of the body that must be adjusted and how).

In our classes with the deaf public, the communicative dynamics of the class needed to be adapted because communication with deaf people are fundamentally anchored in the visual channel, with no support from the auditory one. Therefore, Monica was questioning to what extent she could verbally describe (i.e., by means of signs⁵) the body actions to be adjusted while

⁵ Linguistics and semiotics traditionally associate (vocal) words with verbal language and (manual) gestures with non-verbal language. However, after the emergence of sign language studies and the recognition that signs are

she was performing the asana, given that hands and arms, which are necessary to sign, are also engaged in many ways in different poses.

The asana previously presented in Figure 3 shows an example of this process taking place, because Monica ‘drops’ the action her left arm and hand should be making – that is, to be stretched horizontally like the right arm does – to produce a (manual) verbal description meaning ‘to absorb and raise the kneecaps’. Monica reported, however, that this strategy will be more challenging and maybe impossible in poses in which both arms and hands partially or fully sustain the body, such as the case of *Adho Mukha Svanasana* (Figure 6).

Figure 1. An example of asana in which both arms and hands sustain the body.



Source: Produced by the authors.

For that reason, every time there was a need of offering instructions based on verbal descriptions, Monica tended to rely more heavily on my interpretation. Sometimes, her vocal descriptions demanded my interpretation at the same time she demonstrated the asana, while other times she did that after students finish their practices, when she wanted to correct some common mistakes. This last strategy was the most problematic one. Removed from the corporeal context where the teacher demonstrates the asana, which is important to establish a visual reference to the designated body parts and the actions they must perform (e.g., backwards, to the right, and so forth), I lacked the necessary resources to translate those body actions in a clear way. Gradually, we begin to realize that adapting yoga classes to the deaf public was more than just translating from one language (Portuguese) to another (Libras), but also to consider the perceptual means through which deaf people relate to the world and, consequently, the communicative methods that best suited it.

In the other circumstance aforementioned, when Monica demonstrated the asana and offered vocal verbal instructions simultaneously, I realized the best way of interpreting her would

also structured at multiple linguistic levels, our understanding is that what defines a form of language as verbal or non-verbal is not the channel of manifestation (vocal vs. manual), but rather the presence or absence of linguistic properties in different forms of expression, irrespective of its perceptual mode (for a problematization of the verbal status of sign languages, see Leite, 2021).

be to position myself behind Monica, giving the manual verbal descriptions through signing or, in the absence of a proper vocabulary in Libras, simply pointing to the body parts as well as to the body adjustments Monica was referring to, at the same time she performed them. This last solution, of interpreting behind Monica while she performed the asanas, seemed to work better for me. It also made it easier for students to receive some verbal instructions from the teacher while students themselves were performing the asana, since alternating their gaze towards the teacher (demonstrating the asana) and towards me (interpreting the instructions) would be much less demanding when I stood behind Monica, compared to when we were on the side of each other.

Another strategy the teacher adopted to introduce body adjustments was to touch the students, either helping them to move some specific body part, or just to indicate to them the need to direct attention to that body part and the action required – which is also a communicative method found in the teaching of hearing students. Curiously, I noticed that when she did that, most students would drop their posture to orient themselves visually towards Monica, instead of simply produce the adjustments they were supposed to do. It occurred to me that this might happen because touching another person, in deaf culture, are conventionally employed with the function of calling for the interlocutor's attention in the course of an interaction (HALL, 1989), which is congruent with the kind of responses they were giving. After reflecting on that, in subsequent classes, Monica would sometimes clarify to them that when she touched them, that meant they should remember the body adjustment previously taught and make it, instead of interrupting the posture and visually orienting towards her.

Synchronization of the beginning and end of asanas by a group of students

One challenge Monica identified in conducting the classes to deaf students concerned how to indicate to the group that some asana or sequence of asanas should be finished, when students' gaze was in such a way that it was not possible for her to enter their central vision – for example, in *Adho Mukha Svanasana*, previously shown in Figure 6 above. A solution we found was to adopt a common practice in deaf culture in contexts of interaction involving a group of people: to switch the lights of the room on and off. Therefore, Monica began to switch the lights on and off every time she needed to indicate the end of the pose and the students were not able to see her, indicating the need either to return to a 'rest' position or to make the transition from one asana to another in some sequence.

Reflecting on this solution, however, Monica thought that it might not be the best way to approach the issue – considering, for example, cases where the group involved both hearing

and deaf students, when the yoga class takes place outdoors, among other situations. Such considerations led Monica to conceive, in collaboration with a colleague, the creation of a material support (a prop) specific to deaf students, involving a small lighting box that could be placed in front of the student and be switched on and off by the teacher with a remote control (Figure 7).

Figure 2. Lighting box to synchronize the transition between asanas among deaf students.



Source: Produced by the authors.

Promoting direct interaction between the teacher and deaf students

Since the beginning of the project, Monica manifested how important it was for her to be able to rely on a Libras interpreter in the early days of our project; at the same time, she also made it clear that we needed to think of strategies for boosting her learning of Libras, in such a way that she could eventually communicate directly to the deaf students, with no need of mediation. As a matter of fact, we consider the learning of Libras by the hearing people a crucial step in establishing a relation of trust with the deaf community, as well as in deepening our understanding on how deaf people perceive and relate to the world.

In order to pursue this goal, we began exploring a cell phone app to exchange messages through video recordings in Libras. We created a group for the yoga classes in the app, and when students sent videos, I would offer translation support to Monica by explaining parts she had not understood. In some cases, I would also record videos documenting signs developed in the classes, so that Monica could incorporate them in the subsequent encounters. Moreover, one of the deaf students volunteered to practice conversational skills in Libras with Monica an hour before classes. This collaboration between them extended from early September up to the end of the classes, in December 2019.

The increasing familiarity of Monica with Libras became even more relevant when she began to introduce asanas in sequences, and when the students also became more familiar with

the most practiced postures, making classes more dynamic and fluid. At this point, my mediation as an interpreter began to gradually decrease, in favor of a direct interaction between the teacher and students. Such change was well received by Monica, who reported how new dynamics stimulated her to pursue new ways of communicating with the students, and to practice more frequently those signs that were already part of our repertoire. She also reported that students started to communicate more with her, occasionally correcting her signing when they realized it was not adequate for the purposes Monica was trying to express.

As my activity as an interpreter in the classes decreased, I realized that my stance in the classroom should also change, particularly in those moments when interpretation was no longer required. Initially, I would simply sit and watch the teacher and the students interacting during the whole class, but as the interpretation became more sporadic, I concluded that the best attitude was to stop watching the students, assuming they would not like to have someone continually observing them while practicing their asanas. After pondering on that, I decided to spend those moments without interpretation sitting in silence, with my gaze directed downwards, resuming my visual orientation towards the students only when Monica explicitly called for my interpretation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Finding an appropriate way of communicating with deaf students in yoga classes was the main concern of our project and the basis for these reflections. Surely, we noticed that translation/linguistic issues such as the need of a specialized vocabulary and the emergence of signs for poses were an important part of the experience; but we also noticed the relevance of issues which go beyond the question of translating vocabulary and grammar. The teacher's positioning in the classroom, the adaptation of communicative methods (i.e., the ways of combining verbal descriptions, demonstrations of the asanas and indication of body parts and body adjustments) and the synchronization of the practice among the students were related to the fundamentally visual way deaf people perceive the world. Besides, the possibility of vocalizing mantras evokes – other than the perceptual issue of feeling the vibration – affective and identity issues about how deaf people relate to the use of the vocal apparatus. Finally, promoting a direct interaction between the teacher and the students was, for us, an ethical issue, of demonstrating the teacher's genuine interest in the lives of deaf people, which we think is relevant not only to understand their language, but also their way of inhabiting the world.

In our early interactions with deaf students, they would often tell us disconcerting reports about previous experiences they had with yoga. For example, in an experimental class,

one of the students reported her embarrassment when the teacher asked them to close their eyes during one posture, and after opening her eyes she realized all the group was already engaged in another asana, without her knowing. Another student told us how one teacher regretted not being able to accommodate her in his class because there would be no way they could communicate. Some students thought that yoga could only be practiced with music or with guided instructions offered orally by a teacher, because that was the way they found many practices being done on the internet.

At the end of the year, we were able to evaluate the impact of the project on the experience of deaf participants by collecting some of their accounts in video. One of the students, for example, told us that he was actively engaged in physical exercises for a while and considered himself to have a good physical conditioning, a perception that changed when yoga classes started. He then realized how rigid his body was and started paying attention to parts of his body he never did before. Another student told he used to go to the gym with a distracted mind, and the yoga classes taught him to focus his mind on his body in whatever physical practice he was doing. Another student mentioned that Libras interpreting allowed her to become more familiar with the philosophy of yoga, expressing her surprise by the view and history behind some asanas, such as the warrior pose, which made her more curious about the philosophy of yoga in general.⁶

In sum, we consider that this project, although small in the number of deaf people directly addressed, offered a significant yoga experience for those deaf participants engaged in the weekly classes. Furthermore, and most importantly, it allowed us to start building a knowledge basis that we consider relevant for both yoga teachers and Libras interpreters who, just like us, wants to help establishing new bridges between the philosophy and practice of yoga and the lives of deaf people.

Lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu... May all beings be free and happy...

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Renata Apgama Britto, for mediating our dialogue with the public servers of CFH/UFSC; Project *Yoga Extensão da UFSC*, for offering the props used during the classes; *Victor Hugo Sepulveda da Costa*, for offering Libras conversational sessions to Monica; *Ana Gabriela Dutra*, for the interpretation in some of the classes; *Julia Amaro*, for the pictures reproduced in Figures 4 and 5; and *Alexandre Nuernberg*, for creating the lighting box prototype.

⁶ The video containing these personal reports can be found in the facebook account of the first author, in the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/100002703400841/videos/1899500220150073/>.

REFERENCES

BARROS, N. F. de; SIEGEL, P.; MOURA, S. M. de; CAVALARI, T. A.; SILVA, L. G. da; FURLANETTI, M. R.; GONÇALVES, A. V. Yoga e promoção da saúde. **Ciência e Saúde Coletiva**, v. 19, n. 4, p. 1305-1314, 2014. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/csc/a/4ZSqcXDmfvfXGtbSkB8hw73v/?lang=pt>. Acesso em: 14 dez. 2021.

BATTISON, R. **Lexical borrowing in American SignLanguage**. Silver Spring, MD: Linstok Press, 1978.

CLARK, H. H. Signaling. In: **Using language**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 155-188.

HALL, S. Train-gone-sorry: The etiquette of social conversation in American Sign Language. In: WILCOX, S. (org.). **American deaf culture**. Burtonsville, MD: Linstok Press, 1989. p. 89-102.

IYENGAR, B. K. S. **Light on yoga: Yoga Dipika**. India: Harper Collins. Forty Sixth edition [2014], 1966.

KLIMA, E; BELLUGI, U. **The signs of language**. Cambridge: Harward University Press, 1979.

LACERDA, C. B. F. Um pouco da história das diferentes abordagens na educação dos surdos. **Caderno CEDES [online]**, Campinas. v. 19, n. 46, p. 68-80, 1998. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/ccedes/a/wWScZsyPfR68rsh4FkNNKyr/abstract/?lang=pt>. Acesso em: 13 dez. 2021.

LEITE, T. de A. Reflexões terminológicas no campo da linguística (das línguas de sinais). In: REIS, L. da S; FIGUEIREDO, A. A. de A. (org.) **Línguas de sinais de um continente a outro: Atualidades linguísticas, culturais e de ensino**. Campinas, SP: Pontes, 2021, p. 187-214.

LEITE, T. DE A.; AMPESSAN, J. P.; BOLDO, J.; TASCA LOHN, J.; AZEVEDO, G. S. DE O. Semântica lexical na libras: Libertando-se da tirania das glosas. **Revista da ABRALIN**, v. 20, n. 2, p. 1-23, 22 mar. 2022.

QUADROS, R. M. (org.) **Letras libras: Ontem, hoje e amanhã**. Florianópolis: Editora UFSC, 2014. Disponível em: <https://libras.ufsc.br/letras-libras-ontem-hoje-e-amanha/>. Acesso em: 14 dez. 2021.

RODRIGUES, R. M. (org.). **Estudos sobre o yoga**. São Paulo: Phorte, 2006.

TRIPP, D. Pesquisa-ação: uma introdução metodológica. In: **Educação e Pesquisa**, São Paulo, v. 31, n. 3, p. 443-466, 2005.

Recebido em: 04/05/2021

Aceito em: 15/03/2022