

Myths and half-truths - Setting the record straight about Cued Speech

By Anne Worsfold and Cate Calder

In France, and other countries where it is used, there seems to be a general understanding of what Cued Speech (or, in French, LPC) is and can do, but here in the UK, Cued Speech (CS) users seem to be battling myths and half-truths. Sadly, when CS is misunderstood, it is mainly deaf children who lose out. But, educationalists can lose out too when they struggle to help a deaf child with something which CS would render as easy as pie.

As a simple definition, CS is a visual version of ordinary speech. Just like ordinary speech, it can convey every aspect of language, and so deaf children can fully internalise English (or another spoken language) and can communicate in English.

My colleague Cate Calder, pulled together some of the everyday myths for our newsletter last year, but recently there have been some very misinformed statements from educationalists, and in official or national publications, which is worrying to say the least. Additionally, the half-truths, where a small aspect of CS is presented as the whole, can be very misleading.

Here are some of the recent, or most damaging myths. To counter the myths, we've included some evidence, but for information about the wider body of research, go to the Cued Speech Association UK website.

Myth: CS is 'visual manual support for spoken language development'.

Status: damaging half-truth. CS **can** be used to support spoken language, and it can do that job very effectively, but it should never be defined in this way because its purpose is to clarify whole language for the deaf child to receive – not to teach the deaf child to speak. The definition of CS 'for spoken language development' excludes all the deaf children with little or no hearing who might not be expected to speak but who would benefit hugely from an ability to understand, read, and write in English, and function in a hearing world.

Myth: CS is 'another' signing system, and can be categorised with, for example, Sign Supported English.

Status: untrue. CS is *speech* made visible. It is not at all like a sign, which has no relationship to English. A basic understanding of CS will demonstrate the falsity of this statement!

Myth: you can only use CS with school-age children

Status: untrue. CS is visual speech; would you wait until your hearing baby was four years old before you spoke to them?

Myth: 'Of course, children need to have some knowledge of the spoken language in order to recognise what is being cued so although it can give visual access to spoken language for deaf children, it's not actually a method of promoting language and communicating development on its own.'

Status: untrue. Just like a hearing child who needs to learn the association between a small furry animal which purrs and the spoken word 'cat', so deaf children need to make the association with the cued word 'cat'. No hearing and no pre-knowledge is necessary. For proof take a look at: Kipila, 1985¹ and, Anthony, Moseley, & Williams-Scott, 1991².

Myth: 'Cued Speech can afford effective access to the phonology of spoken English, but not to the actual and essential linguistic features of the language.'

Status: untrue.....And rather contradictory – most of the linguistic features of spoken English are delivered by its phonology.

Obviously, for the deaf child to learn the grammar and syntax of English (even in the absence of any hearing), a hearing person will need to use CS when they say a whole sentence, just as you would use a sentence when talking to a hearing child. There's a large body of research demonstrating language development on par with hearing children – one of the most interesting is the language development of deaf twins born to deaf CS-using parents, as reported in chapter 8 of the book *Cued Speech and Cued Language for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children* by LaSasso, Crain and Leybaert, 2010³. CS even gives access to prosodic features including 'duration, stress and inflection'. See Fleetwood and Metzger, 1998⁴. On a personal note, having jabbed myself painfully in the throat a number of times while cueing 'stop fighting', or similar, I can promise that emotion and emphasis are entirely present in CS.

Myth: CS is a phonics learning tool

Status: half-truth. CS enables full access to LANGUAGE that naturally underpins all literacy skills AND it can be used to support specific phonics learning.

Myths: CS isn't for profoundly deaf children and, conversely, CS isn't for children with mild or moderate hearing loss and CS isn't for children with cochlear implants.

Status: all untrue. You don't need to have ANY hearing to benefit from CS (see chapter 3 in Cued Speech and Cued Language for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children)⁵, and CS fully supports any listening the child can do. CS is of real benefit both **before** implantation - 'Experiencing a cued language early in a child's development will have lasting effects on the child's ability to learn that language auditorily later, when they receive the cochlear implant' ... and **after** implantation - 'comprehension does not develop exclusively by the auditory channel but necessitates audiovisual integration.' (Leybaert, J. & LaSasso, C.J. 2010)⁶

Myth: CS is trying to 'replace signing'.

Status: untrue. It's just ...not! CS is a visual representation of 'spoken' languages – it's not a language in its own right as BSL is – it's just visual English (or visual French etc). It can be used **alongside** signing to give full access to the spoken language within a spoken/sign bilingual approach. This way a deaf child can become a fluent user of a spoken AND a signed language. For an informal look at using CS and BSL together take a look at the CS Association website, 'Cuetube' 'Lel's story' <http://www.cuedspeech.co.uk/index.php?page=our-deaf-son>

Myth: CS is 'too complicated and difficult for parents / professionals to learn'. We've even heard: 'you need a degree in linguistics to learn CS.'

Status: untrue. The Cued Speech Association UK has never known a parent 'fail' to learn how to cue in any of their courses. We teach many professionals too. It is possible to become a skilled cuer in 20 hours or less.

Myth: If deaf children have visual support it will stop them 'listening'.

Status: untrue. We all actually 'listen' with our 'eyes' as well as with our ears. Hearing people make use of lip-patterns to support our processing of what we hear (as evidenced by The McGurk Effect⁷). CS is simply a way of giving deaf children a consistent and phonemically discrete visual 'map' to the lip-patterns of spoken language in real time; this fully supports their listening. Deaf children brought up with CS experience something similar to the McGurk Effect. ('How is the McGurk Effect modulated by Cued Speech in deaf and hearing adults?' Bayard, C. Colin, C. Leybaert, J., 2014)⁸. Also for evidence of improved use of 'hearing' in CS-users, see Vieu, Mondain, Blanchard, Sillon, Reuillard-Artieres, Tobey, Uziel and Piron (1998)⁹.

Myth: CS is 'too complicated and difficult for deaf children to learn'.

Status – untrue, and misleading. Deaf children don't **need** to learn to cue – hearing people cue – deaf children easily absorb English through seeing it *used consistently*. A few deaf children cue (and seem to find it easy), most use CS receptively.

And finally- the most prevalent and damaging untruth of all, and one which surfaced in a government document only last month: That 'deafness' will 'impact' on 'the cognitive emotional and social development of deaf children.' This is blanket statement – not 'some' deaf children, but deaf children as a body. This sets damaging low expectations, and it is **not** true.

Cognitive, emotional and social development can be damaged, but it isn't by deafness per se. Evidence indicates that damage is caused by lack of access to language and communication, especially in the early years. This impacts on language development which, in turn, has implications for the cognitive, emotional and social development of deaf learners. Yet, full access to language, starting in the earliest months, regardless of what can or can't be heard, is easily achievable with CS, and, with full access to language, deaf children can have the same chances as hearing children to achieve normal emotional, cognitive and social development.

Note: if you are not familiar with the McGurk effect, it's a phenomenon where the visual information a person gets from seeing a person speak changes the way they hear the sound. It's a compelling demonstration of how we all use visual speech information. To experience it, take a look at a BBC item at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-IN8vWm3m0>

For more information about Cued Speech, please visit the Association's website at www.cuedspeech.co.uk

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