

# Why Cued Language is a Great Thing for Cued Speech

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Claire Klossner got her start in cued language transliteration in 1982 when she and her family attended the Cued Speech Family Program at Gallaudet University. She began to volunteer at cue camps in 1986, and has since taught cueing to many. Claire works as a cued language transliterator and as a signed language interpreter through Interpreting Matters, a division of Language Matters, Inc. She holds a bachelor's degree in Linguistics from the College of William and Mary and is currently working on a master's degree in American Sign Language Linguistics at Gallaudet University. She has authored or co-authored empirical research, including *Prosody in Cued English Discourse*.

I was four years old when my twin cousins Brad and Becky were born. Looking back, I can see that day changed the path of my life, and the life of my whole family. That day, my cousin was born deaf; less than two years later, we would all be hearing the words Cued Speech for the first time. We have now been a cueing family for almost nineteen years! Our family's story is one we share with many cueing families all over. Although my family has everything to do with why I'm writing this, I'd actually like to focus on something else that many cuers have in common: the "explanation."

I think the cue "explanation" is some sort of initiation dues that we all pay--the day after you cast your lot and say, yes, I know Cued Speech, you will now have to explain it to everyone else who doesn't! In my seventeen years of cueing, I've explained Cued Speech to friends, teachers, a classmate, my boss. A Cued Speech "explanation" has popped up when I least expected it--one time in high school during an interview with an 8-member scholarship committee, MORE than once to a stranger at a party, to neighbors, women at the swimming pool, my first job interview, and, most recently, in front of a classroom of 60 graduate students! I think most cuers have a "cue explanation" repertoire, just like I do: I've got the short version, the long version, the one-sentence version that means, "I really don't have time for this but I'm trying to be polite," and yet another one that starts, "If you've got a moment I'd be happy to sit down and share what I know."

I've answered people's questions so many times that I can see the questions forming in their minds before they even say it. Of course, the questions are never exactly the same, but often they revolve around two major themes. The first one centers around the question, "What do you mean cueing is not a language?" Then how are you supposed to get English out of it?" The second major theme is, "If cueing is based on speech sounds, how can a deaf kid learn it?" Sound familiar?

Looking back, I have to laugh as I try to imagine how I could have possibly fielded those questions when I was a little girl! Somehow, I managed. The truth is, those are hard questions with answers that have not been easy to explain. I've always had cue charts, but no one has ever given me a cue "explanation" chart. There have been times when I've resorted to, "It just happens. I know it works." And that was the truth. I'd seen it work, but how do I talk about it? I know cueing makes logical sense--why does it have to sound like magic when I try to explain it?

The first time I heard the words "cued language" was at work. One of my co-transl iterators happened to mention, "Oh, by the way, we are not called Cued Speech Transl iterators (CST's) anymore. Now we are called Cued *Language* Transl iterators (CLT's)." In all honesty, I just shrugged and went back to work. Why should I care? Changing my title did not change what I did all day (nor did it get me a raise!) However, the more I asked questions, and got good answers, I realized that I DO care about the terminology. Cued language, and the discussions surrounding that idea, give me the tools I need to talk about cueing in a way that makes sense--in a way that can be understood by someone who's never learned a cue in their life! Cued language has given me the words I need so that my "cue explanation" doesn't sound like magic anymore. Let me explain by going back to the 'most frequently asked questions':

- A) What do you mean Cued Speech is not a language?  
Then how are you supposed to get English out of it?

Cuers know two fundamental truths: 1) Cued Speech is not a language and 2) when you cue, what you're cueing is English. (Here in the United States.) We all know this, but how do we talk about it? And worse, how do we explain it to someone else? I know in the past I've said things like, "Cued Speech isn't a language, it's a system of handshapes that represent a language." I've said this even though I know it must sound like science fiction to the person who's hearing it for the first time. I've also said something that sounds like, "when I'm cueing, it's really English in there." Sometimes I try to vary the way I say this, but it all boils down to "it's in there." Let me contrast that with what I've learned from reading Fleetwood and Metzger's Cued Language Structure:

*It's true that cueing is not a language--in the same way that speaking, writing and signing aren't languages. They are all ways to express a language.*

I could speak German, French, English, or Swahili: the speech itself is just noise and hot air. Speech is a way to get the language from one person to another. The same goes for writing, and also signing. I could sign ASL, BSL, LSF, or a host of others, but signing is handshape, location, and movement: it's a way to express one of those signed languages. The same applies to cueing. I can cue English, Spanish, or any language I know, but cueing *itself* is not a language. One way to talk about this is to understand that in the same way that we have spoken languages, written languages, and signed languages, we can also have cued languages. A cued language is a language that is expressed by the system called Cued Speech.

B) If cueing is based on speech, how can a deaf kid learn it?

Here's another fundamental truth that cuers know: profoundly deaf kids use Cued Speech every day to communicate in English. So, how? How do we explain why you do not have to hear English to know English? After all, English is a spoken language. The answer is something all cuers know, we've just never thought about it before. Here's what I learned from Cued Language Structure:

*The answer is that cueing is not based on speech.*

Like I said before, speech is noise and hot air: it's a way to express a language. It is one hundred percent accessible through the ears; however, you can't see it. That means it's not very usable for people who can't hear. Cueing is a way to express a language. Cueing is made up of handshapes, placements, and mouth movements. It is one hundred percent accessible through the eyes. So, if you can't hear at all, it doesn't matter! And suddenly it's quite obvious how you can know English without ever having heard it. Cueing can't possibly be a way to express speech: hands can't talk. But cueing can easily be a way to express a language, and it does so, every day. Cued Speech is the name of the system we use, and it always will be. What we do when we're cueing is cueing a language. A cued language. It's as simple as that.

All cuers already know that cueing is not speech--we've just never thought about it before. To prove it to yourself, take this short quiz:

Where is the more appropriate place to cue?

- A) in a room with the lights off
- B) in a room with the lights on

If you answered B, you already know that cueing is not a way to express speech. We need to see to be able to cue. You can't see speech. The interesting thing about cueing is that we can speak and cue at the same time. But we don't have to--they are two, separate, complete ways of expressing English.

Over the years my family has certainly relied on the fact that cueing was not speech, even though we didn't realize it. The cuers in my family (hearing and deaf) have been know to cue to each other in many different situations--like, between cars on the highway, to say, "Tell Aunt Donna to drive the speed limit!!" Another thing we've figured out is if you need to talk in the middle of church, cueing is much quieter than a whisper. Or, a technique that works great for the cousins in my family: we can cue if we don't want all the adults in the next room to hear what we're talking about! We can tell the person mowing the lawn that they have a phone call. The list goes on! None of these would be possible if cueing was really speech.

That's why "cued language" is a great thing for Cued Speech. The term "cued language" doesn't change the system of Cued Speech at all. What it does, is give us the tools to explain what it is that we do, and why we do it. But don't take my word for it--ask questions, and look for good answers. The first time I sat in on a presentation about cued language, I practically jumped out of my seat! It's what I've been looking for, for 17 years: a better answer than, "It's in there." Now I don't dread my "cue explanation" any more. I know I have the words to explain it and make sense, even to a non-cuer. I'm sold; in my opinion, the term "cued language" is the best thing to hit Cued Speech since the invention of the cue camp.