

French Cued Speech Difficulties in Deaf Adults and Hearing Adults

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Abstract

Objectives

This preliminary study investigates the French Cued Speech (CS) difficulties among deaf adults and hearing adults. CS is a communication system designed for people with hearing impairment to complement speech reading by conveying phonetic information using hands. This multimodal system combines specific handshapes in different positions near the face and the mouthshape (called 'keys') to visually distinguish the phonemes of spoken language. Although many studies have demonstrated the benefits of CS for communication and reading, CS learning resources remain scarce, and there are no studies on CS learning difficulties, particularly in French for the *Langue française Parlée Complétée* (LfPC or LPC). Our VizLector project aims to provide a learning platform with videos in French CS (texts, sentences, and words), automatically categorized by learning complexity level using a clustering model. Therefore, we evaluate linguistic features that we assume are more complex in French CS, and whether there are any differences between coding and decoding in CS, using questionnaires administered directly to the target audience.

Methodology

In total, 10 variables are tested in coding and decoding: the number of CS keys, of consonant/vowels clusters, of double consonants, of transitions between distant positions around the face, of three glides, of obligatory liaisons, and of letter 'x'. We distributed our quantitative and qualitative survey during the summer 2026 training course organized by the French ALPC association (*Association nationale pour la promotion et le développement de la Langue française Parlée Complétée*). Three different questionnaires on coding and decoding difficulties in French CS were used, and 50 responses were collected: 47 coders and 16 decoders (among them, there are 13 people who both code and decode), all adults living in France whose mother language is French. Several profiles are represented: the Deafs, their parents, grands-parents, relatives (family or friends), the CS trainers, and the hearing professionals.

Results

The quantitative results revealed that words containing some of our variables are perceived as much more complex (e.g., 48.93% for words with the letter 'x' in coding, and 21.87% in decoding ; the words with the most CS keys, etc.) than others (e.g., 4.25% for consonant-vowel clusters in coding, and 0% in decoding). The variables are perceived as more complex in coding than in decoding. The qualitative results also showed that the difficulties in French CS coding and decoding vary, that some sounds or keys are more difficult to code (e.g., double consonants, key sequences), and that decoding is highly dependent on the coder. Several participants mentioned fluency and a lack of practice or support as coding difficulties.

Discussion

This study, conducted with the target people, is the first to show what the difficulties are in French CS coding and decoding. The results of this study contribute to improving the learning methods of LfPC trainers, as well as the open source learning platform that we will offer within the VizLector project, addressing the lack of available educational resources.