

The Silent Way

Introduction

Although people did learn languages through the Audio-Lingual Method, and indeed the method is still practiced today, one problem with it was students' inability to readily transfer the habits they had mastered in the classroom to communicative use outside it. Furthermore, the idea that learning a language meant forming a set of habits was seriously challenged in the early 1960s. Linguist Noam Chomsky argued that language acquisition could not possibly take place through habit formation since people create and understand utterances they have never heard before. Chomsky proposed instead that speakers have a knowledge of underlying abstract rules, which allow them to understand and create novel utterances. Thus, Chomsky reasoned, language must not be considered a product of habit formation, but rather of rule formation. Accordingly, language acquisition must be a procedure whereby people use their own thinking processes, or cognition, to discover the rules of the language they are acquiring.

The emphasis on human cognition led to the establishment of the **Cognitive Code Approach**. Rather than simply being responsive to stimuli in the environment, learners were seen to be much more actively responsible for their own learning, engaged in formulating hypotheses in order to discover the rules of the target language. Errors were inevitable and were signs that learners were actively testing their hypotheses. For a while in the early 1970s, there was great interest in applying this new Cognitive Code Approach to language teaching. Materials were developed with deductive (learners are given the rule and asked to apply it) and inductive (learners discover the rule from the examples and then practice it) grammar exercises. However, no language teaching method ever really developed directly from the approach; instead, a number of 'innovative methods' emerged. In the next few chapters we will take a look at these.

Although Caleb Gattegno's Silent Way, which we will consider in this chapter, did not stem directly from the Cognitive Code Approach, it shares certain principles with it. For example, one of the basic principles of the Silent Way is that 'Teaching should be subordinated to learning.' In other words, Gattegno believed that to teach means to serve the learning process rather than to dominate it. This principle is in keeping with the active search for rules ascribed to the learner in the Cognitive Code Approach. Gattegno looked at language learning from the perspective of the learner by studying the way babies and young children learn. He concluded that learning is a process which we initiate by ourselves by mobilizing our inner resources (our perception, awareness, cognition, imagination, intuition, creativity, etc.) to meet the challenge at hand. In the course of our learning, we integrate into ourselves whatever 'new' that we create, and use it as a stepping stone for further learning.

In order to explore the Silent Way, we will observe the first day of an English class in Brazil. There are 24 secondary school students in this class. The class meets for two hours a day, three days a week.

Experience

As we take our seats, the teacher has just finished introducing the Silent Way in Portuguese. The teacher walks to the front of the room, takes out a metal pointer and points to a chart taped to the wall. The chart has a black background and is covered with small rectangular blocks arranged in rows. Each block is in a different color. This is a sound-color chart. Each rectangle represents one English sound. There is a white horizontal line approximately halfway down the chart separating the upper rectangles, which represent vowel sounds, from those below the line, which represent consonant sounds.

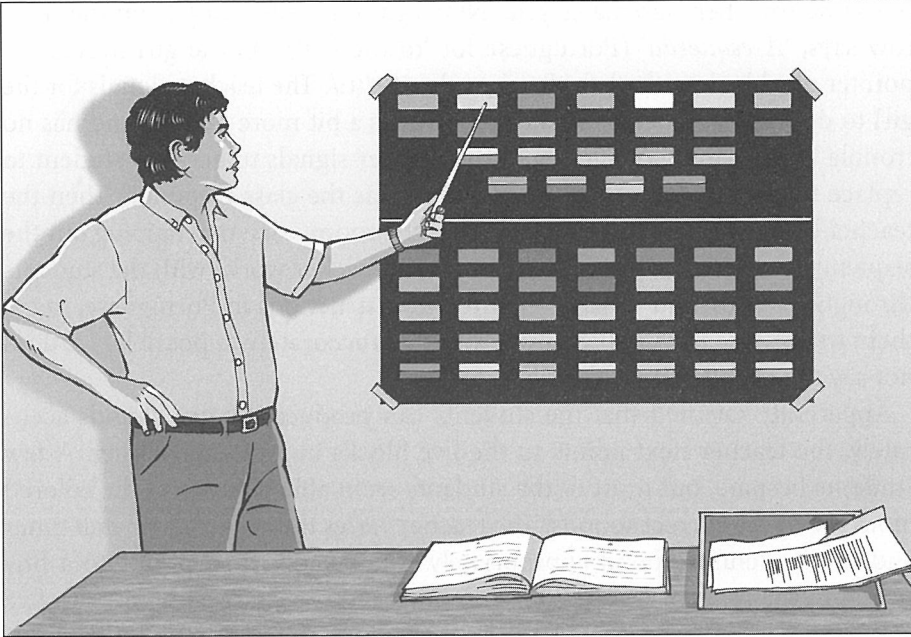


Figure 5.1 The teacher using a sound-color chart to teach the sounds of English

Without saying anything, the teacher points to five different blocks of color above the line. There is silence. The teacher repeats the pattern, pointing to the same five blocks of color. Again, no one says anything. The third time the teacher does the pointing, he says /ɑ/ as he touches the first block. The teacher continues and taps the four other blocks of color with the pointer. As he does this, several students say /e/, /i/, /ɒ/, /u/. He begins with these vowels since they are the ones students will already know. (These five sounds are the simple vowels of Portuguese and every Brazilian schoolchild learns them in this order.)

The teacher points to the rectangle that represents /e/. He puts his two palms together, then spreads them apart to indicate that he wants the students to lengthen this vowel sound. By moving his pointer, he shows that there is a smooth gliding of the tongue necessary to change this Portuguese /e/ into the English diphthong /eɪ/. He works with the students until he is satisfied that their pronunciation of /eɪ/ closely approximates the English vowel. He works in the same way with /i:/, /əʊ/, and /u:/. Then the teacher hands the pointer to a girl in the front row. She comes to the front of the room and points to the white block in the top row. The class responds with /eɪ/. One by one, as she points to the next three blocks, the class responds correctly with /eɪ/, /i:/, /əʊ/. But she has trouble finding the last block of color and points to a block in the third row. A few students yell, 'NO!' She tries another block in

the same row; her classmates yell, 'NO!' again. Finally a boy from the front row says, '*À esquerda*' (Portuguese for 'to the left'). As the girl moves the pointer one block to the left, the class shouts /u:/. The teacher signals for the girl to do the series again. This time she goes a bit more quickly and has no trouble finding the block for /u:/. The teacher signals to another student to replace the girl and point to the five blocks as the class responds. Then the teacher brings individuals to the front of the room, each one tapping out the sequence of the sounds as he says them. The teacher works with the students through gestures, and sometimes through instructions in Portuguese, to get them to produce the English vowel sounds as accurately as possible. He does not say the sounds himself.

Apparently satisfied that the students can produce the five sounds accurately, the teacher next points to the five blocks in a different order. A few students hesitate, but most of the students seem able to connect the colored blocks with the correct sounds. The teacher varies the sequence several times and the students respond appropriately. The teacher then points to a boy sitting in the second row. The teacher moves to the chart and points to five colored blocks. Two of the blocks are above the line and are the /ei/ and /u:/ they have already worked on. The three other blocks are below the line and are new to them. Two or three of the students yell, '*Pedro*,' which is the boy's name. The other students help him as he points to the colored blocks that represent the sounds of his name: /p/, /e/, /d/, /r/, /u/. Two or three other students do the same. In this way, the students have learned that English has a /p/, /d/, and /r/ and the location of these sounds on the sound-color chart. The students have a little problem with the pronunciation of the /r/, so the teacher works with them before moving on.

The teacher next points to a girl and taps out eight colored rectangles. In a chorus, the students say her name, '*Carolina*,' and practice the girl's name as they did Pedro's. With this the students have learned the colors that represent three other sounds: /k/, /l/, /n/. The teacher follows a similar procedure with a third student whose name is Gabriela. The students know now the location of /g/ and /b/ as well. The teacher has various students tap out the sounds for the names of their three classmates.

After quite a few students have tapped out the three names, the teacher takes the pointer and introduces a new activity. He asks eight students to sit with him around a big table in the front of the room as the rest of the class gathers behind them. The teacher puts a pile of blue, green, and pink wooden rods of varying lengths in the middle of the table. He points to one of the rods, then points to three rectangles of color on the sound-color chart. Some students attempt to say 'rod.' They are able to do this since they have already been introduced to these sound-color combinations. The teacher

points again to the blocks of color, and this time all of the students say, 'rod.' The teacher then points to the block of color representing 'a'. He points to his mouth and shows the students that he is raising his jaw and closing his mouth, thus showing the students how to produce a new English sound by starting with a sound they already know. The students say something approximating /ə/, which is a new sound for them. The teacher follows this by pointing first to a new block of color, then quickly in succession to four blocks of color; the students chorus, 'a rod.' He turns to a different chart on the wall; this one has words on it in different colors. He points to the words 'a' and 'rod,' and the students see that each letter is in the same color as the sound the letter signifies.

After pointing to 'a' and 'rod,' the teacher sits down with the students at the table, saying nothing. Everyone is silent for a minute until one girl points to a rod and says, 'a rod.' The teacher hands her the pointer and she goes first to the sound-color chart to tap out the sounds, and second to the word chart to point to the words 'a' and 'rod.' Several other students follow this pattern.

Next, the teacher points to a particular rod and taps out 'a blue rod.' Then he points to the word 'blue' on the word chart. A boy points to the rod and says, 'A blue rod.' He goes to the word chart and finds the three words of this phrase there. Other students do the same. The teacher introduced the word 'green' similarly, with students tapping out the pattern after he is through.

The teacher then points to a pink rod and taps out /pink/ on the chart. The /i/ vowel is a new one for the students. It does not exist in Portuguese. The teacher points to the block of color which represents /i/ and he indicates through his gesture that the students are to shorten the glide and open their mouths a bit more to say this sound.

The first student who tries to say 'a pink rod' has trouble with the pronunciation of 'pink.' He looks to the teacher and the teacher gestures towards the other students. One of them says 'pink' and the teacher accepts her pronunciation. The first student tries again and this time the teacher accepts what he says. Another student seems to have trouble with the phrase. Using a finger to represent each word of the phrase, the teacher shows her how the phrase is segmented. Then by tapping his second finger, he indicates that her trouble is with the second word:

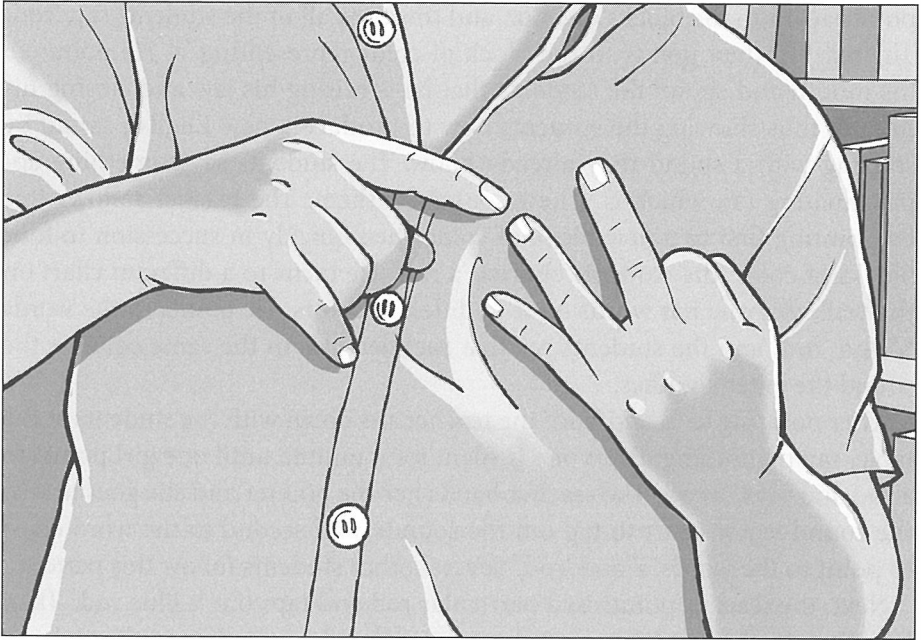


Figure 5.2 The teacher using hand movements to locate a student's error

The teacher then mouths the vowel sound and, with gestures, shows the student that the vowel is shorter than what she is saying. She tries to shape her mouth as he does and her pronunciation does improve a little, although it still does not appear to be as close to the target language sounds as some of the other students'. With the other students watching, he works with her a bit longer. The students practice saying and tapping out the three color words and the phrase, with the teacher listening attentively and occasionally intervening to help them to correct their pronunciation.

The teacher has another group of students take the places of the first eight at the table. The teacher turns to one of the students and says, 'Take a green rod.' The student doesn't respond; the teacher waits. Another student picks up a green rod and says the same sentence. Through gestures from the teacher, he understands that he should direct the command to another student. The second student performs the action and then says, 'Take a blue rod,' to a third student. He takes one. The other students then take turns issuing and complying with commands to take a rod of a certain color.

Next the teacher puts several blue and green rods in the center of the table. He points to the blue rod and to one of the students, who responds, 'Take a blue rod.' The teacher then says 'and' and points to the green rod. The same student says, 'and take a green rod.' The teacher indicates to the student that she should say the whole sentence and she says, 'Take a blue rod and take a green rod.' As the girl says each word, the teacher points to one of his fingers.

When she says the second ‘take,’ he gestures that she should remove the ‘take’ from the sentence. She tries again, ‘Take a blue rod and a green rod,’ which the teacher accepts. The students now practice forming and complying with commands with similar compound objects.

The teacher then points to the word chart and to one of the students, who taps out the sentences on the chart as the other students produce them. Later, students take turns tapping out the sentences of their choice on the word chart. Some students tap out simple commands and some students tap out commands with compound objects.

The students return to their desks. The teacher turns to the class and asks the class in Portuguese for their reactions to the lesson. One student replies that he has learned that language learning is not difficult. Another says that he is finding it difficult; he feels that he needs more practice associating the sounds and colors. A third student adds that she felt as if she were playing a game. A fourth student says he is feeling confused.

At this point the lesson ends. During the next few classes, the students will:

- 1 Practice with their new sounds and learn to produce accurate intonation and stress patterns with the words and sentences.
- 2 Learn more English words for colors and where any new sounds are located on the sound–color chart.
- 3 Learn to use the following items:
 - Give it to me/her/him/them
 - too
 - this/that/these/those
 - one/ones
 - the/a/an
 - put ... here/there
 - is/are
 - his/her/my/your/their/our
- 4 Practice making sentences with many different combinations of these items.
- 5 Practice reading the sentences they have created on the wall charts.
- 6 Work with **Fidel Charts**, which are charts summarizing the spellings of all the different sounds in English.
- 7 Practice writing the sentences they have created.

Before we analyze the lesson, let us peek in on another class being taught by the Silent Way.¹ This class is at a high-intermediate level. The students are sitting around a table on which the teacher has used rods to construct

¹ This high-intermediate lesson is based on Donald Freeman’s lesson in the Department of State’s Language Teaching Methods video.

a floor plan of a 'typical' house. He establishes the 'front' and 'back' of the house by having the students label the 'front' and 'back' doors. He points to each of four rooms and is able to elicit from the students: 'the living room,' 'the dining room,' 'the kitchen,' and 'the bedroom.' Then the teacher points to the walls of each room in turn. This introduces the need for 'inside/outside wall.' By simply pointing to each wall, the teacher gives the students a lot of practice producing phrases like 'the front wall of the living room,' 'the outside wall of the dining room,' etc. Next the teacher picks up a rod and says 'table.' He shrugs his shoulders to indicate to students that they should tell him where to put it. One student says 'the dining room,' but the teacher indicates that he needs more specific directions. The student says 'Put the table in the middle of the dining room.' The teacher does this. He then picks up another, smaller rod. Another student says 'chair.' The teacher indicates that the student should tell him where to put the chair. The teacher works with her, using the charts to introduce new words until she can say, 'Put the chair in the dining room at the head of the table.' The lesson continues in this way, with the teacher saying very little, and the students practicing a great deal with complex sentences such as 'Put the table at one end of the sofa near the outside wall of the living room.'

Thinking about the experience

Since the Silent Way may not be familiar to many of you, let us review in detail our observations and examine its principles.

Observations	Principles
1 The teacher points to five blocks of color without saying anything. The blocks of color represent the sounds of five English vowels close to the five simple vowels of Portuguese.	The teacher should start with something the students already know and build from that to the unknown. Languages share a number of features, sounds being the most basic.
2 The teacher points again to the five blocks of color. When the students say nothing, the teacher points to the first block of color and says /a/. Several students say /e/, /i/, /ɒ/, /u/ as the teacher points to the other four blocks.	Language learners are intelligent and bring with them the experience of already learning a language. The teacher should give only what help is necessary.

3 The teacher does not model the new sounds, but rather uses gestures to show the students how to modify the Portuguese sounds.	Language is not learned by repeating after a model. Students need to develop their own 'inner criteria' for correctness—to trust and to be responsible for their own production in the target language.
4 Students take turns tapping out the sounds.	Students' actions can tell the teacher whether or not they have learned.
5 One student says, 'À esquerda,' to help another.	Students should learn to rely on each other and themselves.
6 The teacher works with gestures, and sometimes instructions in the students' native language, to help the students to produce the target language sounds as accurately as possible.	The teacher works with the students while the students work on the language.
7 The students learn the sounds of new blocks of color by tapping out the names of their classmates.	The teacher makes use of what students already know. The more the teacher does for the students what they can do for themselves, the less they will do for themselves.
8 The teacher points to a rod and then to three blocks of color on the sound-color chart. The students respond, 'rod.'	Learning involves transferring what one knows to new contexts.
9 The teacher points to the words 'a' and 'rod' on the word chart.	Reading is worked on from the beginning but follows from what students have learned to say.
10 The teacher sits down at the table and is silent. After a minute, a girl points to a rod and says, 'a rod.'	Silence is a tool. It helps to foster autonomy, or the exercise of initiative. It also removes the teacher from the center of attention so he can listen to and work with students. The teacher speaks, but only when necessary. Otherwise, the teacher gets out of the way so that it is the students who receive the practice in using the language.

11 The teacher points to a particular rod and taps out 'a blue rod' on the sound-color chart.	Meaning is made clear by focusing students' perceptions, not through translation.
12 One student tries to say 'a pink rod' and has trouble. He looks to the teacher, but the teacher remains silent and looks to the other students.	Students can learn from one another. The teacher's silence encourages group cooperation.
13 The first student tries to say 'a pink rod' again. This time the teacher accepts the student's correct pronunciation.	If the teacher praises (or criticizes) students, they will be less self-reliant. The teacher's actions can interfere with students' developing their own criteria.
14 Another student has trouble pronouncing part of the phrase 'a pink rod.' Using gestures, the teacher isolates the trouble spot for her.	Errors are important and necessary to learning. They show the teacher where things are unclear.
15 After locating the error for the student, the teacher does not supply the correct language until all self-correction options have failed.	If students are simply given answers, rather than being allowed to self-correct, they will not retain them.
16 The teacher mouths the correct sound, but does not vocalize it.	Students need to learn to listen to themselves.
17 The student's pronunciation is improved but is still not as close to the target language sounds as some of the students are able to come. The teacher works with her a bit longer before the lesson proceeds.	At the beginning, the teacher needs to look for progress, not perfection. Learning takes place in time. Students learn at different rates.
18 The teacher listens attentively.	A teacher's silence frees the teacher to closely observe the students' behavior.
19 The teacher says, 'Take the green rod,' only once.	Students learn they must give the teacher their attention in order not to miss what he says. Student attention is a key to learning.

20 The students take turns issuing and complying with commands to take a rod of a certain color.	Students should engage in a great deal of meaningful practice without repetition.
21 The students practice commands with compound objects.	The elements of the language are introduced logically, expanding upon what students already know.
22 The students take turns tapping out the sentences of their choice on the word charts.	Students gain autonomy in the language by exploring it and by making choices.
23 Some students choose to tap out simple commands; others tap out more complex ones.	Language is for self-expression.
24 The teacher asks the students for their reactions to the lesson.	The teacher can gain valuable information from student feedback; for example, he can learn what to work on next. Students learn how to accept responsibility for their own learning.
25 There is no homework assigned.	Some learning takes place naturally as we sleep. Students will naturally work on the day's lesson then.
26 In subsequent lessons, the students will learn to use a number of different linguistic structures.	The syllabus is composed of linguistic structures.
27 The students will practice making sentences with different combinations of these structures.	The structures of the syllabus are not arranged in a linear fashion, but rather are constantly being recycled.
28 Students will practice writing the sentences they create.	The skills of speaking, reading, and writing reinforce one another.

Reviewing the Principles

As you can see, the Silent Way has a great many principles. Perhaps we can come to a fuller understanding of them if we consider the answers to our 10 questions.

1 What are the goals of teachers who use the Silent Way?

Students should be able to use the language for self-expression—to express their thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. In order to do this, they need

to develop independence from the teacher, to develop their own inner criteria for correctness.

Students become independent by relying on themselves. The teacher, therefore, should give them only what they absolutely need to promote their learning.

2 What is the role of the teacher? What is the role of the students?

The teacher is a technician or engineer. 'Only the learner can do the learning,' but the teacher, relying on what his students already know, can give what help is necessary, focus the students' perceptions, 'force their awareness,' and 'provide exercises to insure their facility' with the language. The teacher should respect the autonomy of the learners in their attempts at relating and interacting with the new challenges.

The role of the students is to make use of what they know, to free themselves of any obstacles that would interfere with giving their utmost attention to the learning task, and to actively engage in exploring the language. No one can learn for us, Gattegno would say; to learn is our personal responsibility.

As Gattegno says, 'The teacher works with the student; the student works on the language.'

3 What are some characteristics of the teaching/learning process?

Students begin their study of the language through its basic building blocks, its sounds. These are introduced through a language-specific sound-color chart. Relying on what sounds students already know from their knowledge of their native language, teachers lead their students to associate the sounds of the target language with particular colors. Later, these same colors are used to help students learn the spellings that correspond to the sounds (through the color-coded Fidel Charts) and how to read and pronounce words properly (through the color-coded word charts).

The teacher sets up situations that focus student attention on the structures of the language. The situations provide a vehicle for students to perceive meaning. The situations sometimes call for the use of rods and sometimes do not; they typically involve only one structure at a time. With minimal spoken cues, the students are guided to produce the structure. The teacher works with them, striving for pronunciation that would be intelligible to a native speaker of the target language. The teacher uses the students' errors as evidence of where the language is unclear to students and, hence, where to work.

The students receive a great deal of practice with a given target language structure without repetition for its own sake. They gain autonomy in the

language by exploring it and making choices. The teacher asks the students to describe their reactions to the lesson or what they have learned. This provides valuable information for the teacher and encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning. Some further learning takes place while they sleep.

4 What is the nature of student–teacher interaction? What is the nature of student–student interaction?

For much of the student–teacher interaction, the teacher is silent. He is still very active, however—setting up situations to ‘force awareness,’ listening attentively to students’ speech, and silently working with them on their production through the use of nonverbal gestures and the tools he has available. When the teacher does speak, it is to give clues, not to model the language.

Student–student verbal interaction is desirable (students can learn from one another) and is therefore encouraged. The teacher’s silence is one way to do this.

5 How are the feelings of the students dealt with?

The teacher constantly observes the students. When their feelings interfere, the teacher tries to find ways for the students to overcome them. Also, through feedback sessions at the end of lessons, students have an opportunity to express how they feel. The teacher takes what they say into consideration and works with the students to help them overcome negative feelings which might otherwise interfere with their learning. Finally, because students are encouraged throughout each lesson to cooperate with one another, it is hoped that a relaxed, enjoyable learning environment will be created.

6 How is the language viewed? How is culture viewed?

Languages of the world share a number of features. However, each language also has its own unique reality, or spirit, since it is the expression of a particular group of people. Their culture, as reflected in their own unique world view, is inseparable from their language.

7 What areas of language are emphasized? What language skills are emphasized?

Since the sounds are basic to any language, pronunciation is worked on from the beginning. It is important that students acquire the melody of the language. There is also a focus on the structures of the language, although explicit grammar rules may never be supplied. Vocabulary is somewhat restricted at first.

There is no fixed, linear, structural syllabus. Instead, the teacher starts with what the students know and builds from one structure to the next. As the learners' repertoire is expanded, previously introduced structures are continually being recycled. The syllabus develops according to learning needs.

All four skills are worked on from the beginning of the course, although there is a sequence in that students learn to read and write what they have already produced orally. The skills reinforce what students are learning.

8 What is the role of the students' native language?

Meaning is made clear by focusing the students' perceptions, not by translation. The students' native language can, however, be used to give instructions when necessary, to help a student improve his or her pronunciation, for instance. The native language is also used (at least at beginning levels of proficiency) during the feedback sessions.

More important, knowledge students already possess of their native language can be exploited by the teacher of the target language. For example, the teacher knows that many of the sounds in the students' native language will be similar, if not identical, to sounds in the target language; he assumes, then, that he can build upon this existing knowledge to introduce the new sounds in the target language.

9 How is evaluation accomplished?

Although the teacher may never give a formal test, he assesses student learning all the time. Since 'teaching is subordinated to learning,' the teacher must be responsive to immediate learning needs. The teacher's silence frees him to attend to his students and to be aware of these needs. The needs will be apparent to a teacher who is observant of his students' behavior. One criterion of whether or not students have learned is their ability to transfer what they have been studying to new contexts.

The teacher does not praise or criticize student behavior since this would interfere with students' developing their own inner criteria. He expects students to learn at different rates. The teacher looks for steady progress, not perfection.

10 How does the teacher respond to student errors?

Student errors are seen as a natural, indispensable part of the learning process. Errors are inevitable since the students are encouraged to explore the language. The teacher uses student errors as a basis for deciding where further work is necessary.

The teacher works with the students in getting them to self-correct. Students are not thought to learn much if the teacher merely supplies the correct language. Students need to learn to listen to themselves and to compare their own production with their developing inner criteria. If the students are unable to self-correct and peers cannot help, then the teacher would supply the correct language, but only as a last resort.

Reviewing the Techniques

Many of the ideas in this chapter may be new to you. Some of these ideas may be immediately attractive to you, whereas others may not. Give yourself time to think about all of them before you decide their value to you.

In the review that follows, the materials surveyed in this chapter (the charts and rods) have been included. While you may not have access to the actual materials discussed here, the materials may give you other ideas of what you can use.

- **Sound–Color Chart**

The chart contains blocks of color, each one representing a sound in the target language. The teacher, and later the students, points to blocks of color on the chart to form syllables, words, and even sentences. Although we did not see it in this lesson, sometimes the teacher will tap a particular block of color very hard when forming a word. In this way the teacher can introduce the stress pattern for the word. The chart allows students to produce sound combinations in the target language without doing so through repetition. The chart draws the students' attention and allows them to concentrate on the language, not on the teacher. When a particular sound contrast is new for students, and they are unable to perceive which sound of the two they are producing, the sound–color chart can be used to give them feedback on which sound they are making.

Finally, since the sound–color chart presents all of the sounds of the target language at once, students know what they have learned and what they yet need to learn. This relates to the issue of learner autonomy.

- **Teacher's Silence**

The teacher gives just as much help as is necessary and then is silent. Or the teacher sets up an unambiguous situation, puts a language structure into circulation (for example, 'Take a _____ rod'), and then is silent. Even in error correction, the teacher will only supply a verbal answer as a last resort.

- **Peer Correction**

Students are encouraged to help another student when he or she is experiencing difficulty. It is important that any help be offered in a cooperative manner, not a competitive one. The teacher monitors the aid so that it is helpful, not interfering.

- **Rods**

Rods can be used to provide visible actions or situations for any language structure, to introduce it, or to enable students to practice using it. The rods trigger meaning: Situations with the rods can be created in such a way that the meaning is made clear; then the language is connected to the meaning. At the beginning level, the rods can be used to teach colors and numbers. Later on they can be used for more complicated structures; for example, statements with prepositions ('The blue rod is between the green one and the yellow one') and conditionals ('If you give me a blue rod, then I'll give you two green ones'). They can be used abstractly as well; for instance, for students to make a clock when learning to tell time in the target language, to create a family tree, or to make a floor plan of their house, which they later describe to their classmates. Sometimes, teachers will put the rods down on the desk in a line, using a different rod to represent each word in a sentence. By pointing to each rod in turn, while remaining silent, the teacher can elicit the sentence from the students. He can also make concrete for students aspects of the structure, for example, the need to invert the subject and auxiliary verb in order to form questions.

The rods are therefore very versatile. They can be used as rods or more abstractly to represent other realities. They allow students to be creative and imaginative, and they allow for action to accompany language.

- **Self-correction Gestures**

We already examined some self-correction techniques in the chapter on the Direct Method. Some of the particular gestures of the Silent Way could be added to this list. For example, in the class observed, the teacher put his palms together and then moved them outwards to signal to students the need to lengthen the particular vowel they were working on. In another instance, the teacher indicated that each of his fingers represented a word in a sentence and used this to locate the trouble spot for the student.

- **Word Chart**

The teacher, and later the students, points to words on the wall charts in a sequence so that students can read aloud the sentences they have spoken. The way the letters are colored (the colors from the sound-color

chart are used) helps the students with their pronunciation. There are twelve English charts containing about 500 words. The charts contain the functional vocabulary of English. There are others available for other languages. Although we did not see them in this lesson, students also work with Silent Way wall pictures and books to further expand their vocabularies and facility with the language.

- **Fidel Charts**

The teacher, and later the students, points to the color-coded Fidel Charts in order that students associate the sounds of the language with their spelling. For example, listed together and colored the same as the color block for the sound /eɪ/ are 'ay,' 'ea,' 'ei,' 'eigh,' etc. showing that these are all ways of spelling the /eɪ/ sound in English (as in the words 'say,' 'steak,' 'veil,' 'weigh'). Because of the large number of ways sounds in English can be spelled, there are eight Fidel Charts in all. There are a number of charts available for other languages as well.

- **Structured Feedback**

Students are invited to make observations about the day's lesson and what they have learned. The teacher accepts the students' comments in a non-defensive manner, hearing things that will help give him direction for where he should work when the class meets again. The students learn to take responsibility for their own learning by becoming aware of and controlling how they use certain **learning strategies** in class. The length and frequency of feedback sessions vary depending on the teacher and the class.

Conclusion

In this chapter we saw a beginning lesson and an intermediate lesson, but the Silent Way is used with advanced students, too. For these students the same principles apply, and the same charts are used. In addition, there are pictures for topical vocabularies, books for American cultural settings, and an introduction to literature.

We have avoided referring to the Silent Way as a method since Caleb Gattegno says it is not one. Proponents of the Silent Way claim its principles are far-reaching, affecting not only education, but the way one perceives the living of life itself. Nevertheless, there clearly are implications for language teaching, and you should ask yourself whether there are implications for you.

Do you believe teaching should be subordinated to learning? Does it make sense to you that learners should be encouraged to be independent of the

teacher and autonomous in making their own choices? Do you think students can learn from one another? Should a teacher look for progress, not perfection? Are there any other principles of the Silent Way you believe in? Which ones?

Are there Silent Way materials which would be of use to you? Should a teacher remain silent as much as possible? Is structured feedback a useful thing for teachers to elicit from their students? Which techniques can you adapt to your own approach to language teaching?

Activities

A Check your understanding of the Silent Way.

- 1 There are many reasons for the teacher's silence in the Silent Way. Some of these have been stated explicitly in this chapter; others have been implied. Can you state the reasons?
- 2 What does the phrase, 'Teaching is subordinated to learning,' mean?
- 3 One of the mottos of the Silent Way is 'The teacher works with the students; the students work on the language.' What do you think this means?

B Apply what you have understood about the Silent Way.

- 1 Teach some students a short target language verse which contains some unfamiliar sounds. What nonverbal gestures or cues can you develop to guide your students to produce the correct sounds, intonation, and rhythm as they learn the verse?
- 2 Choose a grammar structure. It is probably better at first to choose something elementary like the demonstrative adjectives ('this,' 'that,' 'these,' 'those' in English) or the possessive adjectives ('my,' 'your,' 'his,' 'her,' 'its,' 'our,' 'their' in English). Plan a lesson to teach the structures where:
 - a You will remain as silent and interfere as little as possible.
 - b The meaning will be clear to the students.
 - c They will receive a good deal of practice without repetition.
- 3 Think of students with a particular native language background. How will you sequence the sounds of the target language in order to teach them to these students, building on what they already know?

References/Additional Resources

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