**7. The Silent Way**

**Introduction**

In spite of the fact that individuals did learn languages over the Audio-Lingual Method, and

undeniably the method is still practiced and experienced these days, one problematic with it was undergraduates’ incapability to readily and eagerly transfer the habits and behaviours they had grasped in the classroom to communicative use outside it. Moreover, the conception that learning a language intended establishing a group of habits that was extremely challenged in the early 1960s. Linguist Noam Chomsky claimed that language acquisition could not conceivably come to pass through habit formation since individuals generate and comprehend utterances they have never heard before. Chomsky projected instead that speakers have a knowledge of fundamental abstract rules, which permit them to recognize and generate novel utterances. Consequently, Chomsky contemplated, language must not be measured a product of habit formation, but rather of rule formation. Therefore, language acquisition must be a procedure whereby individuals use their own thinking processes, or cognition, to discover the rules of the language they are acquiring.

The emphasis on human cognition directed to the formation of the Cognitive Code Approach.

Rather than simply being responsive to stimuli in the environment, students were seen to be much more vigorously responsible for their own learning, engaged in formulating hypotheses so as to determine the rules of the target language. Errors were unavoidable and were signs that students were enthusiastically testing their hypotheses. For a while in the early 1970s, there was great concentration in applying this new Cognitive Code Approach to language teaching. Materials were advanced 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 actually advanced in a straight line from the approach; instead, a number of ‘innovative methods’ appeared. Notwithstanding the fact that Caleb Gattegno’s Silent Way, which the lecturer will ponder in this lecture, did not derive directly from the Cognitive Code Approach, it shares firm principles with it. For instance, one of the plain principles of the Silent Way is that ‘Teaching should be subordinated to learning.’ Otherwise stated, Gattegno supposed that to teach means to serve the learning process rather than to dominate it. This principle is in accordance with the active search for rules ascribed to the learner in

the Cognitive Code Approach. Gattegno looked at language learning from the standpoint of the learner by learning the way babies and young kids acquire. He settled that learning is a process which students initiate by ourselves by mobilizing and activating our inner resources (our perception, awareness, cognition, imagination, intuition, creativity, etc.) to encounter the challenge at hand. Throughout our learning, we integrate into ourselves whatever ‘new’ that people create and generate, and use it as a stepping stone for further learning. **(Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, pp. 80-81)**

**1. Purposes of the Silent Way**

**1.** The all-purpose goal of the Silent Way is to support beginning-level learners acquire basic fluency in the target language, with the fundamental objective being close to native language proficiency and good pronunciation.

**2.** Learners are capable of using the language for self-expression.

**3.** Learners are compelled to advance independence from the teacher, to develop their own criteria for accuracy.

**4.** Learners turn out to be independent by counting on themselves. The teacher should deliver them only with what they absolutely require to advance their learning. **(Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011)**

**2. Characteristics of the Silent Way**

The lecture opens up circumstances that concentrate on the constructions of the language. These

are familiarized over a language-specific sound-color chart. Learners start their study of the language through its sounds. The learners obtain a great deal of practice with a given target language structure without repetition for its own sake.

It should be worth noting that the method gives students a chance to start their study of the language over its essential building blocks, its sounds. These are presented through a language-specific sound–color chart. Depending on what sounds learners already recognize from their knowledge of their native language, tutors control their learners to associate the sounds of the target language with specific colors. Far ahead, these same colors are applied to support learners learn the spellings that symbolize the sounds (through the color-coded Fidel Charts) and how to read and pronounce vocabularies appropriately (through the color-coded word charts).

The instructor establishes situations that emphasis learner attention on the constructions of the

language. The situations give a vehicle for learners to observe meaning. The situations sometimes require the use of rods and sometimes do not; they naturally include only one structure at a time. With minimal spoken cues, the learners are directed to create the structure. The educator works with them, striving for pronunciation that would be intelligible to a native speaker of the target language. The teacher uses the apprentices’ errors as evidence and indication of where the language is unclear to learners and, hence, where to work. The learners obtain a profusion of practice with a given target language construction without repetition for its own sake. They acquire autonomy in the language by discovering it and making choices. The teacher enquires the learners to designate their reactions to the lecture or what they have learned. This offers valuable information for the lecturer and fosters learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Some further learning takes place while they sleep. **(Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011)**

**3. Principles of the Silent Way**

Since the Silent Way may not be well-known to many of you, the lecture in such lecture tries to

review in depth its principles. **(Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, pp. 88-89)**

**1.** 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.** 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.** 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. 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.

**5.** 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 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. The students learn the sounds of new blocks of color by tapping out the names of their classmates.

**8.** Learning involves transferring what one knows to new contexts.

**9.** Reading is worked on from the beginning but follows from what students have learned to say.

**10.** 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.** Meaning is made clear by focusing students’ perceptions, not through translation.

**12.** Students can learn from one another. The teacher’s silence encourages group cooperation.

**13.** 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.** Errors are important and necessary to learning. They show the teacher where things are unclear.

**15.** If students are simply given answers, rather than being allowed to self-correct, they will not retain them. After locating the error for the student, the teacher does not supply the correct language until all self-correction options have failed.

**16.** The teacher mouths the correct sound, but does not vocalize it. Students need to learn to listen to themselves.

**17.** At the beginning, the teacher needs to look for progress, not perfection. Learning takes place in time. Students learn at different rates.

**18.** A teacher’s silence frees the teacher to closely observe the students’ behavior.

**19.** Some learning takes place naturally as we sleep. Students will naturally work on the day’s lesson then.

**20.** The syllabus is composed of linguistic structures. The structures of the syllabus are not arranged in a linear fashion, but rather are constantly being recycled. The skills of speaking, reading, and writing reinforce one another.

**4 .Techniques of the Silent Way**

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. **(Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, pp. 96- 98)**

**1. 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.

**2. 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.

**3. 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.

**4. 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

**5. 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.

**6. 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.

**7. 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 /ei/ are ‘ay,’ ‘ea,’ ‘ei,’ ‘eigh,’ etc. showing that these are all ways of spelling the /ei/ 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.

**8. 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 nondefensive 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.

**5. Nature of Student-teacher 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.

**6. Nature of Student-student Interaction**

Student–student verbal interaction is desirable (students can learn from one another) and is there

fore encouraged. The teacher’s silence is one way to do this.

**7. Nature of Feelings of the Students in the Silent Way**

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.

**8 The roles of teachers and students in the Silent Way**

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.’