

The Silent Way

Background

- **Students who learned through the Audio-lingual Method were unable to readily transfer the habits they had mastered in the classroom to communicative use outside it.**
- **The idea that learning a language meant forming a set of habits was seriously challenged in the early 1960s**

The Silent Way

Background

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.



The Silent Way

Cognitive Code Approach

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.



The Silent Way

Founder

Caleb Gattegno (1911–1988) was one of the most influential and prolific mathematics educators of the twentieth century. He is best known for his innovative approaches to teaching and learning mathematics and foreign languages (The Silent Way).

Gattegno believed that to teach means to serve the learning process rather than to dominate it. He 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 to meet the challenge at hand.



The Silent Way/Principles 1

- The teacher should start with something the students already know and build from that to the unknown.
- Language learners are intelligent and bring with them the experience of already learning a language.
- 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.
- Students’ actions can tell the teacher whether or not they have learned.
- Students should learn to rely on each other and themselves.
- The teacher works with the students while the students work on the language.



The Silent Way/Principles 2

- The teacher makes use of what students already know.
- Learning involves transferring what one knows to new contexts.
- Reading is worked on from the beginning but follows from what students have learned to say.
- 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.
- Meaning is made clear by focusing students' perceptions, not through translation.



The Silent Way/Principles 3

- **Students can learn from one another. The teacher's silence encourages group cooperation.**
- **If the teacher praises (or criticizes) students, they will be less self-reliant.**
- **Errors are important and necessary to learning. They show the teacher where things are unclear.**
- **If students are simply given answers, rather than being allowed to self-correct, they will not retain them.**
- **Students need to learn to listen to themselves.**
- **At the beginning, the teacher needs to look for progress, not perfection. Learning takes place in time. Students learn at different rates.**



The Silent Way/Principles 4

- A teacher's silence frees the teacher to closely observe the students' behavior.
- Students learn they must give the teacher their attention in order not to miss what he says. Student attention is a key to learning.
- Students should engage in a great deal of meaningful practice without repetition.
- The elements of the language are introduced logically, expanding upon what students already know.
- Students gain autonomy in the language by exploring it and by making choices.
- Language is for self-expression.

The Silent Way/Techniques1

- Sound–Color Chart

The Colour Coded Phonemic Chart



The chart is a grid of colored boxes, each containing a phonetic symbol and a corresponding color name. The colors are: green, pink, multicoloured, blue, grey, yellow, red, terracotta, purple, fawn, royal blue, gold, black, plum, scarlet, orange, white, brown, light blue, medium blue, dark blue, and very dark blue.

i: green	I pink	ʊ multicoloured	u: blue	eɪ grey	ih yellow		
e red	ə terracotta*	ɜ: purple	ɔ: fawn	ɔɪ royal blue	əʊ gold		
æ black	ʌ plum	ɑ: scarlet	ɒ orange	aɪ white	aʊ brown		
tʃ teacher	dʒ jacket	θ think	ð this	ʃ shop	ʒ beige	ŋ song	j yes
p please	b bring	t time	d day	k cat	g go	f fun	v very
s so	z zoo	m monday	n now	h here	l left	r right	w well

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The Silent Way/Techniques2

- Teacher's Silence
- Peer Correction
- The Cuisenaire Rods



The Silent Way/Techniques3

- Self-correction Gestures
- Word Chart



*a rod -s -s blue brown
green red yellow black
take color not give 's
and as it to this 's
his two white here too
orange the is her them
these do another that
an the one are he me
put end him back there*

The Silent Way/Techniques4

- Fidel Charts

Color-Coded Fidel Chart

To associate sounds with spelling

a au ai i	u o a ou oo oe	i o u e ia ie ea ae is	y ay uf ai ei hi hea ois	e ea a u ai ay ie eo ei ae	a ho oh ow eau	a i io iou eou ia ie au ea ah he	e o oi oa eo ei iu eau ough y	u o i ea ou y	o a au aw awe ough oo ough oo hau ho oo oi owa	a ea ah aa au e	o oo ew ou u oe ue eu ough wo ieu	e ee ea y ie ei i eo ey ay oe ae is	a ai ea e el hei ae aye ayo ey	oo ou u o	o a au aa oo ou ha aa oi awa	l i y ie ye igh eye eigh is ais ei aye	a ai ay ey ei eigh aigh et ae au e ee	o oe ow owe oa ou ew oh ough eau oo au eo ot	u you lew eau ue ieu ewe yew hu eu eue	ou hou ow ough	oi oy aw	oi	o
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p pp pe ph bp	t tt te ed d tte pt bt ct cht th phth t	s ss se 's z zz ze x si thes sth 's	z ge t c ce sc st sw ps sce sse sch sth tz	m mm me mb lm gm mn 'm m	n nn ne kn gn pn mne in on dne nd n	f ff fe ph gh lf ft ffe pph	v f ve lve ph ve	d dd de ed ld d t tt	th the h t phth	y i j u	l ll le lle ll	wh u o	k kk ke ck c cc ck lk qu que che cqu cch co kh	r rr re wr rh rps rp rt rrh rre lo 're r re 're	b bb be bu pb	h wh j	g gg gu gh gue ckgu	sh ch t s ss c sch sc che	ch tch t c che	ng n ngue nd	j g d dge ge gg dg dj	qu cqu	x xe cc xc	x	x	x
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The Silent Way/Techniques4

- **Fidel Charts**

FIDEL

- Fidel is a set of charts presenting all the possible spellings of each sound of the language using the same color code as the Sound/color rectangle chart and Word charts.



The Silent Way/Techniques5

- **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 Silent Way/Teacher's Goals

Students should be able to use the language for self-expression—to express their thoughts, perceptions, and feelings.

How is this done?

Learners need to develop independence from the teacher, to develop their own inner criteria for correctness. Students become independent by relying on themselves. 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.




The Silent Way/Teacher's Role

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 Silent Way/Student's Role

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.'



The Silent Way/ 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.

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.



The Silent Way/ How are Students' Feelings 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.



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.

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. 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.
- Vocabulary is somewhat restricted at first.
- 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.

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.

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.



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.