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استاذ المادة : أ.م.د. جوهر برك مطر

عنوان المحاضرة

**Silent Way**

## **Introduction**

Silent Way originated in the early 1970s and was the brainchild of the late Caleb Gattegno. The last line of Benjamin Franklin's famous quote about teaching and learning can be said to lie at the heart of Silent Way. The three basic tenets of the approach are that learning is facilitated if the learner discovers rather than remembers or repeats, that learning is aided by physical objects, and that problem-solving is central to learning. The use of the word "silent" is also significant, as Silent Way is based on the premise that the teacher should be as silent as possible in the classroom in order to encourage the learner to produce as much language as possible. As far as the presentation of language is concerned, Silent Way adopts a highly structural approach, with language taught through sentences in a sequence based on grammatical complexity, described by some as a "building-block" approach.

## **Silent Way**

It is a teaching method developed by Caleb Gattegno in the 1950s and 1960s, which emphasizes student-centered and discovery learning. In this method, the teacher is a facilitator who uses visual and physical aids to guide students in their learning, but allows them to discover the language rules and structures on their own. The name "Silent Way" comes from the teacher's tendency to remain silent and allow students to use the language without constant correction or interruption. Overall, the Silent Way is a method that aims to create more engaged and motivated learners by emphasizing active participation and discovery learning.

## **Principles of Silent Way**

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' actions can tell the teacher whether or not they have learned.

5. Students should learn to rely on each other and themselves.
6. 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.
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.
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 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. Students need to learn to listen to themselves.
16. A teacher's silence frees the teacher to closely observe the students' behavior.

### **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.

### **The Role of the Teacher and Learner**

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.’

## **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.

## **Techniques of Silent Way**

In order to facilitate the understanding of this way, it’s very important to follow specific techniques that seem suitable for learners. Those techniques are as follows:

### **- 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.

- 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 /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.

- 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.