THE SILENT WAY: AN UNCONVENTIONAL LANGUAGE TEACHING METHOD

Djulieta NEGRU,
English Language Teacher, teaching degree: I,
Theoretical Lyceum ''George Coşbuc'', Bălţi, RM

Rezumat: *„Calea Taciturnă'' este titlul unei metode de predare a limbilor străine, care a fost concepută de către Caleb Gattegno. Se bazează pe premisa că profesorul ar trebui să tacă cât mai mult posibil în clasă, dar elevul ar trebui să fie încurajat să producă cât mai mult posibil un limbaj autentic în limba țintă. Rolul profesorului este de a direcționa atenția elevilor, de a facilita auto-reflectarea şi de a oferi feedback-ul verbal şi nonverbal atunci când este necesar. Pe de altă parte, elevii sunt încurajaţi să vorbească cât mai mult posibil în limba țintă. „Calea Taciturnă'' aparţine unei tradiţii care priveşte învăţarea ca o activitate de rezolvare a problemelor, creativă şi de descoperire, în care elevul mai degrabă este un actor principal, decât un ascultător pasiv în bancă.*

Civinte-cheie: *metoda de predare a limbii Silent Way, evaluare, corectarea erorilor, feedback structurat.*

Learning foreign languages has always been viewed as useful and important. If there is nothing new about people's views concerning the importance of learning foreign languages, we cannot say the same thing about their role in people's lives. We know that teachers come to teacher training with ideas about the teaching/learning process formed from the years they have spent as students themselves. By becoming clear on where they stand, teachers can choose to teach differently from the way they were taught. They are able to make choices that are informed, not conditioned. In other situations, where a method is not imposed, methods offer teachers alternatives to what they currently think and do. The point is that they will have the understanding to do so if they are able to and want to.

The Concerns for our professional development are based on the new role of foreign languages which is closely connected to the development of society itself. The teacher should think of any learning strategies that he/she can introduce to their students to facilitate their language acquisition. For instance, we will try to convince the reader that *"Teaching Techniques and Principles of Silent Way in English – as a Second Language" is an important step in developing our teaching awareness*. **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.**

Although Caleb Gattegno's Silent Way [3, p. 78] did not stem directly from the Cognitive Approach, it shares certain principles with it. For example, one of the basic principles of the Silent Way is "Teaching should be subordinated to learning". Gattengo believed that to teach means to serve the learning process rather than to dominate it. He concluded that learning is a process, which we initiate by ourselves by mobilizing our inner resources (our perception,

awareness, cognition, imagination, intuition, creativity) to meet the challenge at hand. In the course of our learning, we integrate into ourselves whatever "new" that we create, and we use it as a stepping stone for further learning. One of the mottos of the Silent Way is: *"The teacher works with the student; the student works on the language."* [1, p. 28] **The teacher will remain as silent and interfere as little as possible.**

➢ **The goals of teachers who use the Silent Way:**

Students should be able to use the language for self-expression—to express their thought, 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.

➢ **Some characteristics of the teaching/learning process:**

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 the 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.

➢ **The nature of student-teacher interaction/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**" [5, p. 59]**, listening attentively to students' speech, and silently working with them on their products 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 areas of language that are emphasized. The language skills that are emphasized:**

Since the sounds are basic to any language, pronunciation is worked on from the beginning. Students must 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.

➢ **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.

> **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" [2, p. 43], 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.*

We have come to the conclusion that *The Silent Way* has a great many principles. We will point here just a few of them. Perhaps we can come to a fuller understanding of them if we know what are the goals of teachers who use the *Silent Way*. We must understand the role of the teacher and at the same time the role of the students during the process. On the other hand, we must find out how the teacher responds to student errors. We will understand what the criteria of teacher's silence are and what peer correction and self-correction mean.

PRINCIPLES:
1) The teacher should start with something the students already know and build from that to the unknown.
2) Learning involves transferring what one knows to new contexts.
3) **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/she can listen to and work with students. The teacher speaks, but only when is necessary. Otherwise, the teacher gets out of the way so that it is the students who receive the practice in using the language.**
4) If students are simply given answers, rather than being allowed to self-correct, they will not retain them.
5) In subsequent lessons, the students will learn to use a number of different linguistic structures. The students will practice making sentences with different combinations of these structures.
6) Students will practice writing the sentences they create.
7) The structures of the syllabus are not arranged in a linear fashion, but rather are constantly being recycled.
8) The skills of speaking, reading, and writing reinforce one another.
9) The syllabus is composed of linguistic structures.

➢ **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, and then is silent. Even in error correction, the teacher will only supply a verbal answer as the last resort.

➢ **Self-correction games:** For example, 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.

➢ **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

The role of the teacher and the role of the students during the process:

The teacher is a technician or engineer. "Only the learner can do the learning" **[8, p. 13]**, 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**, [4, p. 34] *"The teacher works with the student; the student works on the language."* **The teacher will remain silent and interfere as little as possible.**

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