

The late Dr Caleb Gattegno, the founder of the Silent Way, used to come to Europe about twice a year to give public workshops organized on his behalf by various educational organisations. These workshops are legendary among his followers.

In the following article (received February 1987), Dr Gattegno explained how he ran these courses. Readers may be interested not only in the content of the workshops but in the particular method used by Gattegno to present the material and principles of his way of working. Gattegno's provocative work is not well represented in academic bibliographies but has been hugely influential in our field at the level of practice.

Silent Way Workshops

by *Dr Caleb Gattegno*

My courses on the Silent Way are for teachers who want to learn as much as they can about my work on teaching foreign languages. We work either for 20 hours, usually over a weekend, or for 40 hours in a five-day workshop. I never think of our meetings as training sessions. Every time I give a course, I give a different course. What matters to me about those who come is that when they leave, they value the exchange of the hours they gave to work with me for what they take away.

Note taking is discouraged for I do not want anyone to think that all I do is pass on information which needs to be stored somewhere until needed. Instead, I tell the participants that whatever I'll bring to their notice is plain common sense. Possibly, some will encounter it in the field of language teaching for the first time at that meeting. I point out that once they realise how basic our observations are, they will understand how things can be done as we suggest they should be in the classrooms where foreign languages are being taught and learned.

Listed below are some of the themes on which we spend time in the workshops for teachers.

1. The mother tongue is the hardest of all the foreign languages. The second language makes sense as a system of expression and communication since learners encountered just such a system when they worked on acquiring their first language. But for the first language (L1) they had to do everything from scratch. So acquisition of L1 will teach us a great deal and we look at that with great care.
2. The system of sounds of the new language is the only common basis for all utterances in it whatever their purpose. So it must be given first place in the acquisition of the second language (L2) and mastered as soon as possible. For this, a special instrument has been made part of the Silent Way materials and techniques and is called the 'sound/colour chart'. (People at the workshops are shown that it can be mastered in any of the languages used in about two hours_ and joyfully too.)
3. Since words have no meaning of their own, the source of meaning must be perception. Linguistic situations can be created in a number of ways; the most effective so far has been found to result from actions on a set of coloured rods with which all the structures of a given language can be exemplified clearly and without ambiguity. This part of the course of learning a language takes from 20 to 60 hours of classroom work and means that newcomers to the language are given a familiarity with the essential vocabulary that is called 'functional' as distinct from the 'topical'. Participants to workshops, therefore, do not see language learning as concerned with memorising vocabulary and grammar but

as a complex intellectual activity based on the use of affectivity, perception and actions, always in close contact with students' images and imagination. By knowing that all learners are intelligent, capable of awareness and endowed with a will to know, teachers can now challenge them more broadly and more deeply than when they are seen only as retaining systems. As a result, learning of L2 is accelerated, has lasting effects and is usable as easily as the L1s of the students, though not on all topics life may present. Even if the functional vocabulary only numbers a few hundred words, it serves to produce all the structures of L2s.

4. Increasing your vocabulary is not really a great challenge and there are techniques which facilitate retention and meaning of words. From the start, and for some time in the beginning, we are mainly concerned with the criteria of rightness (i.e., how natives use their language) and correctness (i.e., how rightness translates itself into grammatical structures). When new words are introduced, they refer to conventional meanings and we stress then the criterion of adequacy (i.e., one gets what one asks for and not something else, or, each word triggers a particular meaning and conversely). The workshop offers mainly exercises. In a 40 hour course participants meet up to 10 different languages. Each new language serves to introduce, on the one hand, a new technique and, on the other hand, to facilitate it, the materials esigned to give students the successive masteries required by the language.

5. Thus, the first exercise is with the sound/colour chart and takes care of a good pronunciation in that language. The second exercise applies this gain to the mastery of numeration in a second language. The third exercise may introduce commands (i.e., the imperative) with the coloured rods and word chart number one. Thus the students, without ever having heard a word in a third language, can ask for and obtain what they ask for from other students, or see to it that these commands are executed properly in terms of word order, number and gender. For instance, "Take a few rods of various colours. Put one here, two there. Give me some and give the rest to someone else."

6. The next exercise may be on a language which has, besides the singular and the plural, the dual (like Arabic) or a different for the first three multiples (like Russian). The next exercise may handle declensions in an inflected language (Arabic, Greek, German or Russian) and clarify the use of endings by using the rods in situations which define the nominative, the accusative, the genitive (as in Arabic), the dative (as in German and Greek) plus the locative and instrumentative (as in Russian). This may take two or three lessons, shifting from one language to another. Sometimes a lesson uses two languages (such as Japanese and French) alternatively (on an agreed signal) on the same situation. This is to prove to participants that confusion does not necessarily result from thinking about this. A tone language (Mandarin or Thai) is added to show how easy it is to merge sounds conveyed by colours and tones indicated by signs used in that language or added on the word chart.

Such a workshop has an enormous impact on the participants who discover themselves as learners, making them ready to grant to their own students the qualities that all learners can bring to their task. This cannot be obtained and is not attempted through discourse. Participants experience "the subordination of teaching to learning"*) and in the course of these rich hours, they may come to understand my observation that "only awareness is educable"*) For those who take part, there is much to be gained. More even than the expected returns from a week's workshop on 'methods' for language teaching. Indeed, the Silent Way is not a method, at least not for its creator.

*) These are basic principles in Gattegno's work, editor.