

Further Insights Into Learning Languages



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It is not because we had too many articles left over from the previous issue that we devote most of this newsletter to language learning. It is rather because we have something we believe to be worthwhile to share with our readers.

If only our readers will let us know that they find something valuable in the article on “The Spirit of English,” we can produce a series of sequels concerned with the spirit of some other languages and so launch this most important study. Interesting per se it is also of significance for language teachers and their students. Later on we may devote some space to translating these insights into techniques.

One of the short articles is included here because it brings to us a rare statement: a learner, sensitive to some obstacles in learning something not quite new, tells us about them in a manner both illuminating and fresh.

A longer article tells us of a perceptive Silent Way teacher involved in learning a new language and discovering what can make one functional in language learning, provided one has a good teacher.

The news items tell of the spelling game, of the sound-color Fidel and its distinctive contribution, and of the video project for beginner readers.

A brief history of the Silent Way may be welcome by readers.

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The Spirit Of English

Native speakers of English are sensitive to how other languages differ from theirs and they notice the differences — sometimes as strange ones. But, except for recognizing that foreigners make mistakes, they have difficulty in noticing what foreigners experience with respect to English.

Two or three decades ago, the Fries-Lado group, were ready to conceive of as many ways of presenting English as there were students with differing languages in their classes.

Such a task is clearly beyond an ordinary teacher, particularly if English is the only language known to him or her.

In my teaching of languages, which extends over almost half a century and has involved groups in almost fifty countries, I have learned that it is not necessary to adopt the viewpoint of the Fries school and that an alternative approach exists. Disregarding the ways of thinking associated with the various languages, I have studied how I can present a given language (here English) so that the students know how the natives of that language function mentally and have managed to create such a language. In some of my writings of the last 30 years, readers have been able to follow my work on that matter. Here I shall attempt to express what seems to me to escape native English-speaking teachers generally, but is essential for a correct entry by foreign students into the English language.

A few remarks to begin with.

Consistency is the form of truth displayed by language. In other words, only at some stage in his study of a language does a student become aware that native users of that language transmute what they perceive as true into sets of noises which only display consistencies. That adjectives in English remain invariable with respect to number and gender is an example of such a consistency.

Economy is a built-in feature of every language in order not to burden the memory of its users, who are normally native speakers. This has meant a number of things. Roots or stems of words exist in far smaller numbers than the set of actual words of any language. Variations of some kinds have maintained, in various forms, the intentions of the successive authors of the language. In English, for example, “-ly” added at the end of an adjective makes it an adverb, “ship” or “hood” changes a noun into another with a definite extension of meaning from the first to the second. Economy-like consistencies are expected and welcomed by all users of a language, native or foreigners, because they assist in reducing the demands on the learners and in widening the scope of the language.

The immense variety of the idiosyncrasies among the languages functioning on earth indicates that all languages are experiments in expression. This suggests that the behaviors imposed upon any language can be anything and that nevertheless millions of people can adopt that language for their own verbal expression. There is nothing in living languages to make them inaccessible to natives and, often, to foreigners as well.

Natives, when they are babies, do the right things and manage very early on to learn their environmental language in a few months, even though they are engaged in many other learnings at the same time. If we knew what these right things were, we would all become excellent teachers. Indeed, we would offer our students exercises that would accelerate learning, increase awareness and facility, and lead to expanded mastery as learning proceeds.

Because the public likes to listen to orators, we can say that some users of a language have managed to find a way of exalting the musical qualities of that language and of hanging on the melody those cadences and sonorities that are capable of generating images which are considered beautiful and powerful. Orators teach us that words are triggers of images, emotions and thoughts, which fill listeners and move them to give of themselves.

As triggers, words can generate much more than themselves. Various languages represent, in what they permit and what they forbid, what we can call modes of thought. While most natives have little inkling of them, foreigners can either accept or reject them, according to their purpose in entering that language. English, for instance, allows most nouns and adjectives to become verbs without any alteration in their form. This is forbidden in most other languages, and refers to what we can consider to be a characteristic of the British mode of thought and, to a certain degree, of the American one as well. In this mode of thought action prevails, and actions translate into verbs. When I learned English in the mid-40's, the predominant role of verbs in English forced me to reconsider my own thinking and make room for what I had not cultivated until then. My previous writing (mainly in French) and my previous reading (including German, Spanish, and Italian) gave more prominence to substantives and attributes which aimed at erecting monuments to stand forever and by themselves. If time had to be made part of the presentation, it was via historic viewpoints. With English everything changed. Time is implicit in the English use of verbs, and each example illustrates a changing thought never finally expressed, never standing by itself on its own logic. The only logic binding the English speaking people is that of action, irreversible but replaceable by another, perhaps a more adequate one. Suggestion rather than categorical affirmation is preferred. The search for principle is not the main preoccupation of the English-speaking world; precedent is preferred instead. Anything that works proves directly that it complies with the demands of reality. Truth is found in how adequately a thought meets the tests that are proposed to "measure" its validity. If we wish to make foreigners aware of the spirit of English by making them assimilate behaviors of the language which cultivate that spirit, we can refer to the very special jobs the verb "to do" does in the language. In another language "Did you?" has

thousands of translations according to the context. But it always refers to what a subject was involved in, which is rendered by another verb: see, take, sleep, etc. The fact that an action verb, such as “to do,” is an auxiliary verb in English confirms that the active mode of thought is the one that the English-speaking people chose for themselves. In Britain there are many more irregular verbs than in the United States, where peoples from all over the world have affected the usage of the language. In British English there are forms which remain invariable, such as “learning” or “understanding,” because they encompass a category; in the United States they become ordinary nouns and are thus used sometimes in the singular, sometimes in the plural, as they are in some Romance languages, for instance.

In English, it is rare that hyphenated strings of words are suggested for a concept. In German, it is common (dropping the hyphens), and in the United States such license exists that the British resist. The dominance of small words in English agrees with the active mode of thought that aims at actions to be performed and done with. The difficulty for foreigners learning English is not to be found in the vocabulary and the grammar (which barely exists in a permanently evolving language) both of which can be retained. Rather it is found in the percussive sounds rendered by the many small words in each sentence. This dominance has led second-class writers to advocate the use of short sentences with short words of rarely more than two syllables and the avoidance of statements which lead to reflection and require that one stop when reading. Hence English could gain the status of the international language of commerce and trade, of engineering and communication, understood as a means of getting things done. It is not the prestige of a great power (which Britain no longer is) that makes people all over the world want to know English. Rather it is the understanding that English is the vehicle for international intercourse best suited to the kind of relating acceptable today to the world’s national or tribal units who while attached to their traditions, also want a higher (or the highest) standard of living. English is a complex and flexible instrument capable of being adopted by all the people on earth. But it must be understood that such adoption means that only those matters which are found at the level of somewhat superficial intercourse — called the level of living of the man-in-the-street for purposes of making things happen — can be rendered adequately in

English by foreigners. More and more the language is not supposed to entertain profound searches of the soul. The medium of newspapers and magazines demands a use of English that can be accommodated to the visuals that TV pours onto the people, i.e., the casual comment. The wealth of the visual image reaches everybody directly. Words are a remote medium and in the modern quick-living societies of today, the spoken and written language tends to become telegraphic.

Still, for centuries writers have found in languages the power to express the most profound feelings and thoughts they meet in their cogitations and deep experiencing. Their language has been molded to such depth. Now it must remain the vehicle of a small fraction of mankind for the continued sharing of true human experience. Such a use of English is a personal, individual application of the historically developed language very different from the vehicle needed for the widening of trade on a planet, where thousands of speeches permit local sharing of special experiences cultivated in limited areas.

Pondering why English and no other language had managed to capture the present interest of mankind in a universal language, I found the answer in its free evolution as a means of expression unfettered by academies and bodies of rulers, and instead affected by people from everywhere who are allowed to make their impact on it. English is capable of becoming what the speakers want it to be. As the population that needs it grows by leaps and bounds, it will both diversify by generating hundreds of dialects for local uses and tend to express uniformly only that which can stand the strains of extension, i.e., the most common needs of all of us.

To learn English requires first the acknowledgment of its particular use and then the acquisition of the means of that expression. The grammar of the English for all mankind will be like a manual for an electronic apparatus.

That English will have its grammar, an easy one that will be learned more readily than the English of its original writers.

The spirit of English makes it the language of action. Action at this historic juncture is the further expansion to the whole planet of the material benefits that the British first and now the Americans have extended to all through trade and commerce. Since there are not too many restrictions about how the vehicle can be used, it has become the choice of more and more people as the planetary language. People learned that they too could use the vehicle for such matters, while reserving their own language for their other preferred personal purposes. The Chinese people are no exception. They need an international vehicle and today only English is in the running.

C.G.

A Cantonese Speaker Learns Mandarin

What I thought about most before I began the Mandarin course was the role my Cantonese background would play in the matter. I was sure it was going to be the hindrance it was when I took one lesson of Mandarin some years ago and came out remembering the Cantonese equivalent. I estimated that for any one idea which might share the same sound in both dialects, there were many that differed only slightly and many that bore no resemblance at all. There was also the difference in melody. Before the course even started, I decided not to look for similarities nor differences but to take Mandarin as a “completely” foreign language and put my Cantonese away for awhile.

The first two days of Mandarin the Silent Way certainly did provide enough foreignness to “dépayser” even stout hearts. I got some comfort from having anticipated the phenomenon if not the degree. Panic seemed high for those who had to undergo an initiation to the Silent Way and an introduction to Mandarin at the same time and to whom feelings generated by the former were perhaps indistinguishable from those generated by the latter. During the third day of the course when we worked with more structures, the foreignness of the language receded markedly for me because I became aware of my Cantonese working for me as soon as 的 was introduced. The sound is the same in both dialects and so is the usage. I accepted 了 through my knowledge of its equivalent sound and usage in Cantonese although its Mandarin sound was new.

When I say that my Cantonese was working for me, I do not mean that I thought in Cantonese nor that I was translating into Cantonese but that I had another entry to comprehension through my knowledge of Cantonese. I can describe this entry as a kind of lens that could focus on a particular point or on recognition in general. A particular point was the usage of 的 whereas recognition in general meant that there were times when I said, “Yes, this is Chinese to me.” I now realize that from the start, it was my Cantonese that made it possible for me to seek tones naturally and to feel their impact as carriers of meaning just as context, sound, gesture and so on are carriers of meaning.

During the course I found myself consciously calling on my Cantonese to help me with sentence patterns after we as a class had worked on them during the demonstration. I would use the Cantonese as a change of lens to see if I could gather any more light on the subject if I hadn't completely understood and also to see if I could get other views or feelings about the subject even if I had understood. In the latter case I usually searched for contexts from my past experience, an occasion when I had used or had heard used an equivalent expression, situations from daily life where a structure from class could fit, visits to Hong Kong and China when I could have used an expression and so on.

Cantonese helped me the least on sound production. The guttural sounds in Cantonese are not found in Mandarin, and tongue position found in Mandarin are not present in Cantonese. My English helped me more. I thought of certain Mandarin sounds as words spelled and pronounced in English. I did not bother to do this except with a few words which gave me trouble such as 士 and 下. With regard to the tones. I worked them out from the charts when I had the time, but most often I just superimposed a Cantonese melody on the Mandarin words. My Cantonese would make it sound Chinese to me even if I could not be sure it sounded Mandarin.

I got my most striking impressions of what Mandarin should sound like on the few occasions when the instructor spoke Mandarin and on the innumerable occasions when she spoke English. I suspect that her accent in English is made of that which makes Mandarin sound very Mandarin. When I heard her speaking Mandarin, I was usually

concerned with content as well as melody and sounds, trying to cover all bases at the same time so to speak. When she spoke English, I was freed from most of the search for content in that unless I wanted to dig around for deeper meanings or fuller ones, I had “understood” immediately. I felt I had at these times another access to the melody of Mandarin and to certain Mandarin sounds and that I could not help but hear them.

J.C.L.

What Did I Learn In Mandarin Workshops, I, II, III

I learned a lot of Mandarin. And this, in spite of my preconception about myself that the words in a new language do not easily stay with me. Because of my belief that my mind is like a sieve as far as retaining new words is concerned, I was prepared to end up with knowing very little of Mandarin, and ready to learn what I could about the Silent Way. But, in the course of the workshops, I found myself actually retaining the words and spontaneously using them with regard to the situations to which they belonged. This was a delightful surprise, and I learned why it was possible.

The fact that all the charts were there all the time with all the characters we were meeting and getting to know, was extremely helpful to me in my retention. I could be with the new words for as long as I wanted in order to internalize them and get really acquainted with them. Uttering them to myself, I could look, for as long as I needed to, at those specific words which I felt escaped me when introduced. I could, from time to time, throw a passing glance at those which were more or less a part of me. I did this in between the pauses or even when we were with other activities. They were there to let themselves be felt. I could exercise my freedom to be with more than one thing at a time because of the constant availability of the charts. On the charts each character had its own location, its own address as it were. Because of the property of color which gave away how it sounded, each character

had a name, as it were. This provided me with an ease to reach different characters at will. Once I would gain the facility to utter them and thus transcend the usefulness of the colors, I could concentrate on their shapes. After a few hours of work when we were asked to write, we all took up the challenge happily.

The skill and sensitivity with which Shio-Ley — the teacher — introduced to us the color code and the word charts, was as important as the availability of the charts. First, by using a chart with colored rectangular shapes on it, she introduced the sounds that go with the colors. She gave us ample practice to form the links between the colors and the sounds. In no time we were uttering Mandarin words and phrases as pointed on the chart, proving that through our perception of the colors we could evoke the specific sounds, string them together, and articulate them. This practice was carried on to give us a “feel” of our mastery of the connection between the colors and the sounds. This game was pursued neither to reach nor demand perfection but rather to let us exercise the alertness of our mind.

The four tones used in Mandarin were introduced very early (along with the color code) with the chart with rectangles on it. On the charts that contained the Mandarin characters, the tones were indicated spatially by a dash (-). The placement of the dashes next to the characters on the charts indicated which of the four tones was applicable. I soon realized that in Mandarin the correct use of the tones was very important and that the tones were not a luxury that could be ignored. I found that in some cases the words which sounded the same but conveyed different meanings were to be distinguished by their tones besides the context or their written form. No wonder the tones were introduced from the start. While learning them I realized that to give the tonal quality of Mandarin to my voice, I needed to use my energy in the required specific ways as I uttered Mandarin words. Shio-Ley made this visible to me by placing some energy in her arm and moving it in space. Learning the tones became a symbolic game: the precise input and expenditure of energy perceived in the direction and movement of Shio-Ley’s arm, transferred to the potential energy in my voice, controlled and articulated through my will in my utterances which were corrected and modified because of my

awareness of what was required. Not once did Shio-Ley let me down by being the model and thus tempting me to abandon my “learning to use myself differently” in favor of “wanting to imitate her.” Shio-Ley provided the gestures. I remained with my perception and with my ability to let my perception affect my voice. Thus I attempted the utterances which had the tonal quality as an integral part of them.

Outwardly we were working with a few colored rectangles and dashes, indicated to us with a pointer. Inwardly we worked on ourselves and produced lots of words, phrases and sentences that sounded Mandarin. The grouping of words in our sentences was introduced, again, through very clear gestures. Shio-Ley would place the words in a sentence on the tips of her fingers in the correct order. She would then group or separate her fingers to indicate the correct phrasing or variations on it. At times she had us listen to the beat produced by her hand on the table and we transferred what we heard to the sentences we were uttering. Entirely on the basis of our mental activity we were learning to say the Mandarin sentences with the required phrasing, stresses and pauses. There was no one around we could imitate. The activity of learning continued to be joyful, an activity generated from within in the form of the interpretations by our intelligence of what we perceived and our willful translation of it into our utterances. The teacher provided us with the rules of the game which made sense to us, and we played the game as well as we could. While Shio-Ley worked on how to present to us the various aspects of her language — the sound combinations, the tones, the structure, the phrasing, the stresses, the pauses, the melody — we remained alert with our ability to perceive the meaning in what she indicated to us and improved our functioning in the new language by being with our awareness of what we were meeting from moment to moment. Shio-Ley’s skill in the clear-cut and well sifted presentation of Mandarin enabled our learning to be self-motivated and creative. Her approach to teaching allowed us the freedom to stay with our perceptions and with our ability to make variations on our energy movements so that we could formulate our utterances in harmony with what we perceived. For me the “learning-teaching” of Mandarin went as follows: while Shio-Ley worked on how to make the imperceptible aspects of Mandarin perceptible to us, I worked on myself with the help of what my perceptions brought to me, and attempted to learn how I could consciously affect the formulation

of energy in me so that I made it obvious that I was gaining facility in the language being learned. Clearly, we were consciously engaged in altering some of our functionings as a result of our active learning.

Learning the sound combinations and tones, and our acquiring a sensitivity for Mandarin phrasing, melody and structure went on for a certain number of hours. We uttered sentences and worked on our ability to say them with fluency without yet knowing what they meant. The meaning was not there, but the exercises were meaningful. We were working on the aspects of Mandarin which were not just remotely but immediately significant. They permeated the whole of Mandarin which included the little we could utter, the much which was to come our way, and that which we were probably not to meet in these three workshops.

Shiow-Ley introduced the meanings by generating unambiguous situations and by starting with imperative verbs. The clarity with which the meanings of words, phrases or sentences were introduced made me see that while learning a new language I did not have to learn the meanings. Rather, I needed to perceive them in the situations. Meanings — which resided in the situations — once perceived, were recognized by me to be a part of my experience. I only had to make the link between what I perceived to be the meanings, and the words that went with it. This observation made, I could be more with the situations and less with the anxiety to hold in my memory what the words or phrases meant. Thus relaxed, I could put more of my energy in making sense of the situations presented by Shiow-Ley. I could be more attentive to the structure of the sentences and give more of myself to the practice in order to gain fluency. All this made learning Mandarin very exciting.

With my attention on the structure, every now and then I would get glimpses of the unique Chinese mode of thought. I noticed, for example, the special way in which the negative interrogative sentences in Mandarin are structured, or, the order of words when a sentence states comparison. While I made these observations I found myself close to the spirit of Mandarin made explicit through its structure.

The work done in the Workshop #I, proved to be the solid foundation for the explosion that took place during the following two weekends. Workshop #II made available to us (1) lots of action verbs, (2) the facility in expressing ourselves in three tenses, and (3) words and expressions for a number of spatial and causal relationships. All these were used again and again with a change here and a change there. There was no room for repetition in what we were doing. The stress was on working on our ability to express ourselves freely, using our knowledge of, and sensitivity for Mandarin. We were encouraged to speak even if the meanings were not yet fully understood. Invariably there was someone in the group who had understood, and his or her utterance, coupled with understanding, would help others.

In Workshop #II, we read Mandarin written in black and white. The sentence and phrases on the sheet of paper were composed of the characters we had met on the first three charts. With the sheet in my hand and the charts up on the wall in front of me, I had the exact measure of my mastery as far as this exercise was concerned. I could decipher some of the characters straight away. Some others I could read after throwing a glance at their colored form. When I met some of them in print, I found myself resisting to look up, for I knew I could read them without going to the colors. It was fun to discover as a learner the subtle and important role of colors.

By the time we were into Workshop #III, Shio-Ley would produce quite complex situations with the rods and we would get into describing them. Mandarin was a part of us as a consequence of having participated in a number of intelligent exercises. By this stage it would flow from within us as soon as we would be confronted with the challenge to express in Mandarin our perception of a situation. In the previous two workshops we had worked on the various components of the language. Our way of working had given us a lot of practice in the use of the language. Not only some knowledge, but a sense of how Mandarin behaves, were to some extent a part of our functioning. This helped us to be free to express in Mandarin our view of the situations in front of us. I give here one example. Shio-Ley constructed with the rods the following situation:

The crossing of 14th St and Fifth Avenue

On Fifth Avenue there are a number of cars moving. There are big cars and small cars. There is an American car with an American lady in it. There is a Japanese car with an English gentleman and a Japanese lady sitting in it. There is a German car... and so on. Miss J. walks on 14th St. with her cat. The cat suddenly runs towards Fifth Avenue. Miss J. calls her cat, but it does not come back to her. It stops right in the middle of the crossing. Miss J.'s heart starts to beat fast, faster and faster.

Up to this point the story was being developed collectively by the class. Now, "Why did Miss J.'s heart start to beat fast?" asked Shio-Ley. "Because her cat does not understand that it was dangerous to stand there." "Because she saw a car coming towards the cat," "Because she thought her cat will be run over by the car," "Because she loved her cat!"

These are some of the sentences spontaneously offered by the students. It was lots of fun to use the rods as cars, a Persian cat, a huge dog, as well as people. We used them to stand for buildings one moment and as trains, ships and bridges, at other moments. Streets were built with the rods as were the cities represented. With her active imagination, Shio-Ley made full use of our ability to imagine the small pieces of wood to stand for almost anything. This simple unstructured tool could yield so much. This was a lesson to me.

One of the useful exercises in which Shio-Ley involved us was to put questions to us in Mandarin every few hours, usually before each break. As hours passed, the question-answer sessions got more and more complex, representing the range of our acquaintance with the language. Since there was no pressure from her that everyone should understand every question and be able to answer, these brief sessions became an opportunity for us to assess for ourselves how much sense we could make of what we heard without dwelling upon each word and its meaning. We could also judge how free or hampered we felt in using the language when answering the questions. For some of us,

additionally, it was an opportunity to pay attention to the sounds and tones as they sounded smooth and melodious coming from a native.

The care with which Shio-Ley presented the basics of Mandarin to us made me ponder how carefully she must have sorted out her knowledge of her mother tongue to make our entry into it an exciting one. Having exposed to us those aspects of Mandarin which we could not invent, Shio-Ley would be there to give us clues regarding what we could do with ourselves in order to be functioning in Mandarin, in the way the natives do, that is, have the words appropriate to the situations be automatically evoked and articulated, with a sensitivity at work supplying the right tones, the correct structure and the required melody.

Learning is an activity of an alert mind, and it enhances the alertness of a mind which engages in it. On the basis of my experience in the Mandarin workshops I would restate the above statement in words as simple as: "I found it rather easy to learn Mandarin."

S. G.

A Brief History Of The Silent Way

It will soon be a quarter of a century since I started the development of a way of teaching foreign languages that has come to be known as the Silent Way. Since, for the moment, I am the only one who is affecting its unfolding, at least in so far as I can know from publications, it may be of interest to readers to have a short statement about its history.

As a language teacher, I already had students in 1928. To them I gave lessons that looked very much like the ones I had taken. From 1946, to 1954, I was often involved in professional discussions with language teachers and teachers of teachers although I did not earn my living in that field. In April 1954, I became aware that the colored rods I had been using for one year to teach mathematics, could equally well and as easily, be used to generate opportunities for people to speak. I called the examples concretized with the rods, "linguistic situations." For five years I explored thousands of such situations adapted to the specific challenges confronting language teachers, such as: how to determine unambiguously the declensions for beginners in German, Russian, Latin; how to illustrate in a clear fashion the various present and past tenses of a few languages: how to present en and y in French; ser and estar in Spanish; gli and il in Italian and so on. At the same time I gave lessons to people in a score of countries on four continents, not all in languages using the Latin script.

Up to 1961, I wrote with white chalks on chalkboards. After I had developed and had printed the charts of Words in Color I made colored

charts for the teaching of English, French, Spanish. Once in Montreal in 1963, I was asked how I could teach the speaking of a new language and not say a word. I answered, "Because this is the Silent Way," and the name stuck.

So then, I could already distinguish two forms of the approach. In the first I started with the rods and said things once to put them in circulation because no charts were then available. This was necessary. When the charts became available the second form emerged. I could soon use the coloring given to the printed words to elicit the proper sounding of new words through decoding because the colors represented the sounds and the sounds in them had already been met. In such cases I did not have to even say those words once. I became half again as silent as I had been in the introduction of words containing some new sounds, and fully silent when students used what they knew. This form lasted till March 1974. During these eleven years I developed along the same lines the materials for a dozen languages.

In Cuernavaca (Mexico) during one lesson I noticed that if, instead of starting with the rods and putting some words into circulation (which had been my way of teaching since 1954), I could manage to begin with the Fidel, that I might do things better. The experiments then were so clearly positive that soon after, what we now call the Silent Way III (or SW III), was born. Once tried out in a number of languages it proved to be a distinctive progress over SW II and I (although the label did not exist then). In the book on The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages, SW III is the subject.

From October '75 to January '77, a new version of the Silent Way (SW IV) made its appearance. The trigger for it was the transformation of SW III to allow me to produce video tapes to teach foreign languages. The challenge now was not only to keep the teacher silent but to make him invisible. What is new here and forms the substance of the SW IV, is the raw material actualized on tape of learners learning a language when taught by a Silent Way teacher using the materials and techniques adapted to the demands of TV studios.

As soon as we face the demands of TV and manage to produce a few series of video language programs we are in a new situation, obviously: one capable of producing the SW V. That's where we are now. When it will materialize and how, is to be described in a future report.

Here let us put in a diagram the stages mentioned above.

	<u>SW I</u>	<u>SW II</u>	<u>SW III</u>	<u>SW IV</u>
Characteristics -	Linguistic situations	Linguistic situations	Fluent speech first, numeration	Learning from learners on video tapes
Materials -	colored rods	wall charts, colored rods, pointer	Fidel, chalk-board, wall charts, colored rods & pointer	sounds & images
Teacher -	Present says things once	Present says some things once	present says nothing	not visible silent

P.S. The notes above were written in October. Recent developments are indicating that we shall soon have access to radically new ways of working that were totally unforeseen until now.

C.G.

News Items

1 We have had the opportunity to produce a pilot TV program for the teaching of reading to beginners, using the Words in Color approach.

Mr. Ralph B. Rogers' Foundation in Dallas invited us to tape, in the studios of Channel 13 in that city, the first four hours of learning to read English. We involved in the taping 8 first graders who spoke English, age six and above, from a public school in the Dallas Independent School District. For the first two days of taping, a viewing class of 23 first graders was also involved in the project. They were the complement of the 8 students under the cameras and had been invited in order to find out whether their viewing on TV a class involved in learning to read through the techniques of Words in Color would also lead them to learn to read.

The pilot tapes are remarkable for a number of reasons.

- They show so clearly that it was possible to put on tape the actual learning done by a group of eight children. These children acquire, under the viewers' own eyes, a) the discipline of reading and b) how this serves them to solve the problem of associating English sounds to the printed material. Viewing these tapes is an unforgettable experience for teachers of reading and for students of learning. Since it is the first time that learning to read is exposed in this manner, the 12 cassettes

that were made in Dallas in November '77 represent a breakthrough in this field.

- In these tapes, no teacher is seen or heard. Only the learners learning and the materials they need. Occasionally a voice emits once a sound that is picked up by the students. Hence it is permissible to state that these students show how they can manage to objectify reading from within and therefore from what was already there, i.e., their spoken English and their mental powers.
- Because no editing is allowed, all there is on the tapes is the raw material of learning and its physiology. We can see exactly how learning is taking place. This has never been possible to be conveyed before. In the many years of experience in teaching reading, we had never been able to capture, until this taping, what we saw happening again and again in clinic case after clinic case. Now it is there for all to see. The aesthetic emotions that accompany the viewing is an additional element that confirms the preciousness of these moments.
- For years we have attempted to bring teachers of reading to the realization that very little was required beyond the learning to speak one's language in order to become a reader. Very few were ready to listen because of ingrained disbelief. Now, only the stubborn and the intellectually dishonest will continue to deny this fact, for on these tapes it becomes obvious that once the act of reading makes sense, the rest follows easily, as in all other human learnings. All that is then required is to proceed systematically in presenting to students one item at a time, and let them integrate the contribution of the new item to what they already own.

As this process unfolds itself on the tapes, we find ourselves deeply moved by the spectacle of these children actually integrating the new, and with it, renewing the already integrated in them, which now gains further scope and possibility.

That children acquire the skill of reading as well, as a by-product of the activities suggested to them, makes these tapes still more valuable.

We wish to thank Mr. Ralph B. Rogers for making this demonstration a reality.

2 As in previous years, some of us have been invited to work with educators in Europe during the fall. Dr. Cecilia Bartoli spent five weeks working mainly with language teachers in Paris and Lyon and giving them opportunities to study the learning of a new language as a preparation for the study of teaching, which she also did.

Because very few people have had experience of these study areas — contrasted to being interested in either learning a specific language and in being exposed to methods of teaching — the seminars and workshops offered by her were 1) well received, 2) well attended, and 3) capable of leading to a good number of the participants finding in them new resources to become contributors to the field.

Participants in the beginning find it hard to say what they learn in such courses, because the main gain is an inner transformation rather than some new knowledge. But as they take advantage of such opportunities to work on themselves and to search for applications of their growing capabilities in the field of language, they gather the evidence that the road to becoming better teachers is through becoming more and more attentive to human learning. In the evidence provided by the numerous feedback sessions and the few papers submitted, it becomes clear that some visible dent is being made on the armor that shields many of those who teach their language simply on the basis of being natives in it. There are now a growing number of responsible language teachers and Paris contributes to it substantially.

Dr. Gattegno visited Barcelona first and worked with a large group of teachers who teach either English or Spanish or Catalan. The 18-hour weekend was very intense and served mainly to provide varied illustrations of how the studies at the base of the Silent Way can guarantee that languages can be learned by any student, whatever his or her age, provided there is good will in him and there is available a knowledgeable teacher and adequate materials.

In spite of the shock of meeting so much that was new, a number of the participants indicated their willingness to take the plunge and use the Silent Way in some of their classes. Another development there can be found in the keen interest of teachers of Catalan, who have to face over

one million non-Catalan speaking workers in this industrialized part of Spain, in training themselves as Silent Way teachers in order to increase yield and speed up the job in front of them.

For the first time, French speaking teachers were involved in numbers in two seminars in Paris given in French by Dr. Gattegno. This beginning seems to promise an expansion of our contacts with French education, normally impermeable to overseas influences because: 1) the French system of education is centralized and tightly controlled by the government, 2) its historical evolution makes it elitist and cultural rather than popular and practical. Some of the problems experienced recently are forcing the bureaucracy to look beyond its own ranks for solutions.

A 20-hour math workshop in Lyon attracted 110 people of very different levels of competence. Given in French to a majority of teachers of elementary schools, the course illustrated how it was possible

- to eliminate fear of math,
- to enter directly into a variety of chapters without necessarily following a linear development, as is usually done in schools,
- to provide challenges that held the attention of the participants long enough for them to sense where their mind functioned mathematically,
- to expose the workings of the mind so as to distinguish those that are sustained by the dynamics of perception from those that use the dynamics of language, and how both of these workings lead to an awareness of the dynamics of relationships (as mathematics do).

Such a course (rarely offered) could serve to shift the focus of educational reformers from curriculum reform to the study of what is actually possible to reach with students.

The third group of Silent Way teachers to have completed the Advanced Course leading to our diploma, worked in Paris with Dr. Gattegno. The main challenge proposed to the participants to work on was concerned with an estimation of the energies required in the various activities that form the Silent Way.

This difficult study may lead to one further renewal of the Silent Way on its road to becoming fully conversant with what actually happens to people involved in learning a language through the techniques and materials of the Silent Way.

3 During two days in France, a group of 40 teachers from various regions and a few countries were present at demonstration-lessons arranged so as to serve teachers of “educational rejects” and teachers of the deaf, to find what can be done for these students beyond what goes on at present.

These events are only stored in the memory of the participants, although their contents may be of universal significance.

No one asks of any teacher that he or she finds out what the members of their class can actually do with themselves. Courses of studies tell teachers what to do and administrators rarely ask for something else. In France, government inspectors have the duty to see to it that the official regulations are observed.

Hence, when the students in Dr. Gattegno’s classes responded very differently from what has become their routine behavior and showed endowments officially denied them, tensions showed up in the teachers present. Unable to rationalize the display of mental power shown by everyone coping with challenges that teachers never dare to present to “such students,” witnesses retrenched in positions that would keep the status quo going. Good willed people, dedicated educators, moved by what they experienced remain powerless before the enormity of the task of making others accept the reality of what they witnessed.

That all our school children are given a starvation diet which keeps them weak and makes them grow to be always far below their potential is a fact that does not yet find its way to the minds of those who run the educational show. This is the measure of today's tragedy in education everywhere.

When the so-called "handicapped" can prove that they can manage in some new tasks to be even faster than their teacher, when during the span of a single lesson considerable obstacles on some student's way simply vanish because he or she makes them vanish deliberately, we can imagine what could be done with the "gifted."

Will the tensions generated in the teachers lead to some students' becoming joyful learners? Perhaps one day we shall be allowed to report it.

4 From Paris we heard that a small group of adults studied Hebrew using the video tapes we mentioned in the previous newsletter. The report was enthusiastic. Learning was intense, systematic, lasting and enjoyed by all. Further lessons are planned for a group meeting in order to learn all the material covered in the 40 tapes; only half have been studied so far.

5 Laurin Lewis tells us that a group of Silent Way teachers in Paris are meeting regularly once a month to continue the work done at the seminars, workshops and in their own teaching. Readers interested can get information by writing to him c/o

Ecole Universelle de Promotion
59 Boulevard Exelmans
Paris 750 16
France

6 A new product - The Spelling Games

We are offering classrooms in which students study their own language, English, an inexpensive instrument for a thorough and enjoyable way of conquering spelling.

The notes for the teacher — though short and simple — give her a large number of exercises that can occupy the class for many hours of engrossed activity.

Since the main component of the instrument is the classroom English Fidel, it is clear that we have had this product on our shelves for some time. When teaching remedial classes the Fidel has been used again and again. What is new now is that i) we have separated the use of the Fidel from that of the rest of the materials of Words in Color, thus not requiring teachers to relate reading and spelling as we used to do, and ii) we no longer think that it is necessary for users of the Fidel to be trained as teachers of spelling. The instrument and the notes look to us as self-explanatory and sufficient to assist teachers to do a very good job.

Looking at the new product we find that it has two properties which can specially appeal to teachers, i) it is most likely the most versatile product on the market for this purpose, that can make one compare it both to an indefinitely reusable chalkboard and to a geography globe usable in so many ways, and ii) it cost so little that every classroom can afford one.

In the kit which contains the classroom Fidel, there are a miniaturized version for use with the key, in the preparation of lessons, a book of examples, a pointer and the notes for the teacher. A companion each teacher will learn to love.

7 The sound-color Fidel was out only a few weeks ago but it has found its place in numerous classrooms in many parts of the world.

Prototypes have been produced for a few languages and tested extensively. All users report delight in having the English one for use and are struck by its functionality which allows students to concentrate at once on the color-sound relationship so helpful in the new Silent Way. In particular having this new Fidel has given native teachers who used the Silent Way, an opportunity to assess exactly the value of color in learning language this way and to which they had actually paid little attention.

We can add that what we called above the Silent Way V came into being after this Fidel became an essential instrument integrated in the approach.



About Caleb Gattegno

Caleb Gattegno is the teacher every student dreams of; he doesn't require his students to memorize anything, he doesn't shout or at times even say a word, and his students learn at an accelerated rate because they are truly interested. In a world where memorization, recitation, and standardized tests are still the norm, Gattegno was truly ahead of his time.

Born in Alexandria, Egypt in 1911, Gattegno was a scholar of many fields. He held a doctorate of mathematics, a doctorate of arts in psychology, a master of arts in education, and a bachelor of science in physics and chemistry. He held a scientific view of education, and believed illiteracy was a problem that could be solved. He questioned the role of time and algebra in the process of learning to read, and, most importantly, questioned the role of the teacher. The focus in all subjects, he insisted, should always be placed on learning, not on teaching. He called this principle the Subordination of Teaching to Learning.

Gattegno travelled around the world 10 times conducting seminars on his teaching methods, and had himself learned about 40 languages. He wrote more than 120 books during his career, and from 1971 until his death in 1988 he published the Educational Solutions newsletter five times a year. He was survived by his second wife Shakti Gattegno and his four children.