

# Analysis of Benefits and Defects of the Silent Way

## -- A Case Study of Flipped Classroom

Yuan Liu

China West Normal University, Nanchong, Sichuan, 637600, China

### Abstract

The Silent Way (SW), introduced by Celeb Gattegno, is well known for the use of Cuisenaire rods to the teaching of sounds of foreign language by different colors. And it is also known for its tenet that teachers should be as silent as possible in class and that learners should speak as much as possible. As one of the famous eight teaching methods in western academy, it used to be an important foreign language teaching theory. This unique teaching method has significant benefits and defects, which is the main reason why it has disappeared from its popularity. The purpose of this paper is to briefly introduce the features and explore the two aspects of the silent way. Also it will combine the flipped classroom with the silent way to explore the further application of it.

### Keywords

The Silent Way; Language Learning; The Flipped Classroom.

## 1. Introduction

From Caleb's point of view, in the foreign language teaching which applies the SW, the teacher should focus on the students and the students should try their best to work on the language (Caleb, 1976). That is to say, the teacher should be silent as much as possible in the classroom and the learner should be encouraged to produce as much language as possible. This method uses a structured syllabus, in which teacher introduces a new language structure and then reviews the learned ones. All these structures are made by propositional meaning, not their communicative competence.

What made the SW teaching method unique is that the teachers play some different roles during class. Teachers will provide the model for students to allow and remain silent much of the time and make them use the newly learned language as much as possible. The success of this approach in enhancing learning as it is based on the subordination of teaching to learning. SW views learning language as a problem-solving, creative, discovering activity, in which the learner is a principal actor rather than a bench-bound listener. It can withstand the trials presented by the varying backgrounds, ages and temperaments of students because in this approach, teaching is guided at all times by the learning processes of the students (Richards, 2001).

There are many advantages of SW teaching method, but as this method is so innovative and sometimes neglect students' basic needs of learning language under the immediate guidance when they make some mistakes.

## 2. The Overview of the SW

### 2.1. The Theoretical Basis of the SW

The silent way teaching method encourages students to discover learning, regarding language learning as a way of solving problems. The learner should return to an infantile state of learning. The second language learner is not like the first language learner because his knowledge of one

language does not allow him to learn a foreign language as if he were learning a second language. So we can learn this method from following aspects:

(1) Gattegno's manual approach, based on the principle that successful learning involves a commitment to language acquisition through silent perception and active experimentation. This method repeatedly emphasizes the importance of learning over teaching and the need to focus on the learner itself on the learner's priorities and obligations.

(2) Silence is considered to be the best vehicle for learning because in silence students can focus on the task that needs to be accomplished, which makes it easier to get to succeed. Repetition, which is taken as the opposite of silence, will need to use time to encourage divergent thinking and continue to have discussion in class. On the other hand, it actually avoids repetition in this way, therefore it will produce an aid to alertness concentration and thought organization.

(3) Memory acquired by mental work and thinking is much more effective than memory obtained by mere mechanical repetition. Moreover the key to stimulate consciousness is also written. In fact, the memory chain is formed during the greatest silence during sleeping.

(4) Consciousness is also teachable. If a person is learning consciously energy of consciousness, the ability to learn is greater than the traditional method. Therefore the silent method claims to be helpful in what psychologists call "learning to learn". In addition a process chain of developing awareness comes from attention and the output self-correction, which needs full attention. Silent learners acquire herd standards that play an important role in a person's education throughout their life. These internal standards allow learners to monitor and self-correct their own output. This is the ability of self-awareness in the silent method which is hardly appreciated or practiced by native learners.

(5) From a study of the context in which the silent method emerged, it is clear that the silent method focuses on student-centered class and encourages students to not just sit on the original place but to participate in the classroom and engage in active exploration. Thus this method can use discovery and solutions to solve problems through self-awareness and perception.

## **2.2. An Introduction of Flipped Classroom based on the SW**

In the traditional teaching method, teachers will spend most of their time in preparing teaching materials before class, and always want to teach as more as possible in the process of teaching, just being afraid that they cannot finish their tasks. And students just need use their ears to listen to and take notes by hand, which means they nearly do not have to think by themselves. However, the silent way provides some new teaching thoughts, such as the flipped classroom. As known to all, the flipped classroom is developed from long-range network teaching, the new platform for teaching and learning, but to trace it to its source, the silent way actually form a theoretical foundation for the developing of it. So in this paper, the flipped classroom will be used as an important case to show the meaning of SW.

Firstly, in this method, it will focus more on students themselves, paying attention to what students feel and think. The key to flip the class is that students need to use the learning materials provided by teachers to study by themselves and think logically, then students can find the right ways to solve problems. Its learning efficiency will be higher than the traditional teaching classroom, as through the concentrated thinking before class, students can try their best to explore the deep meaning of what they have learned and in the end acquire the target language.

Secondly, the silent way has instructive meaning towards the set of tasks before class in the flipped classroom. Repetition is always a very effective way to solid language learning, but in the aspect of divergent thinking, it also can be seen as not a valid way of promoting. The quality of preview before class, preparation and self-learning directly determines whether the

implementation of the flipped classroom will be succeed or not. So teachers should avoid the pointless repetition in terms of the same knowledge point ,but design some creative, interesting and challenging activities around this topic. Let students do have the impulsive thoughts to learn, not just sit there to be taught.

Thirdly, the silent way advocates teachers to try their best to keep silent in the classroom, so it can let students form the habit of discovery learning, and the self-standard of language learning, which has excellent enlightenment. As for the latest implementation of the flipped classroom, the role of students and teachers has changed quite a lot. That means teachers are no longer the ones who just teach all the things by themselves but they, the designer and supervisor, now should guide and inspire students to output. The silence of teachers is of great importance to let students have the space and time for self-thinking, and in the process they can form their own standards of language learning, then they can correct the output language by themselves. All above can enhance the output quality of language.

### **3. The Comments of the SW**

#### **3.1. The Benefits of the SW**

As one of the language teaching methods in the process of language development, the silent way have its own benefits to instruct language learning. Followings are some of them:

Firstly, the silence of teachers supply much more space and thinking dimensions for students ,compared with other teaching methods that relate to class-oriented ways. It encourages students to become the main part of the class, and explore more questions actively by themselves. Under such a relaxing classroom atmosphere without the control of teachers, more students can engage in the teaching activities with their unique logical thoughts, which can improve the classroom participation of students. Without the direct correction of teachers, students need to correct their problems by themselves or each other. And also without the direct teaching of new knowledge , students need to explore more and make the conclusion by the end of learning. It can inspire students to learn by themselves and be responsible for their learning effects.

Secondly, students can obtain more chances and time to have teamwork, so they can get more by learn from others. In this process, more students will share what they think about one problem and they may have some different opinions, then they will discuss and maybe argue with each other. They can practice their target language with each other and correct other's mistakes through communication. So from this angle, the silent way can push students to form the awareness of teamwork and be good for mutual improvement, as problems can be dealt with through partnership.

Thirdly, the silent way teaching method focuses on teaching subordination learning in language classroom. Students are encouraged to do more experiments of language through the way that teachers leaves more time to let students practice their language skills. Not being stuck in the burden of reciting the sentence structure, students can find their potent of language learning in the process of more practices because they do not need to worry about mistakes. Actually students will try to think about these mistakes they made and discover the key points of the target language. This method of teaching will make students motivated enough to be more innovative and creative.

#### **3.2. The Defects of the SW**

Although the silent way teaching method has more obvious advantages than other teaching methods, it inevitably exists more problems which lead to its disappearance. It is also "a seminal contribution to understanding the learning process at all ages" (Richards 2001).

Firstly, for the long time of silence, students can only get little of the output of teachers, then the others need to be learned by students themselves, which may cause some misunderstandings about the target language. As in the silent way teaching class, students are not pushed to recite the basic knowledge as in the traditional class which will make them neglect to practice the basic parts of language. The learning of language is actually a long term memory of the words and sentences, and need to know the basic grammar through practices of using the target language. As shown in the silent way teaching process, teachers in the class just show a little examples to teach new knowledge for students to learn which will make a lot of matters for students to get familiar with its language system. Learning language needs students to keep on practicing.

Secondly, another defect of the silent way is that it neglects a lot of pragmatic teaching materials people need in their daily life. Taking the task-based language teaching method as an example, this method focuses on the point that students should be put into real situations of daily life and be given some tasks to solve, then they can get the ability to solve problems. However, the silent way is not relevant to any of these ideas, which makes students cannot practice the target language in their daily life. After a long time, students will find that they cannot get what they want, and teachers will also be challenged for how to effectively guide students to learn.

The third weakness of the silent way teaching method is that it cannot be used for complicated knowledge, such as the knowledge of grammar and cultural background. What's more, this method also could only be used in a small size class, not bigger one, for it allows each students to join in this class by speaking out the target language with the help of teacher's pointer. In this kind of class, students cannot learn the target language in a clear system because of the lack of enough demonstration of knowledge by teachers. So the silent way teaching method in fact is suitable for the primary learning stage and there is actually no efficiency in this way.

#### 4. Conclusion

The silent way lays emphasis on the inner factors of learning and students' learning process. However, the active external environment that contributes to the development of inner factors can never be neglected. Thus teachers should make use of the silent way to fully activate the subjective initiative of students, and at the same time an external language environment for students to improve students' learning efficiency is also necessary. Some visual materials are always regarded as the memory helps to teach students, that is also why these materials have been widely used in many language-teaching class. The silent way teaching method well presents the advantages of applying tools of teaching to language-learning class and the extraordinary part of this method is encouraging students to practice target language as much as possible. By using the rods or other physical materials in the class could only work for the elementary level students whose language is quite easier to understand. For high level students, it will be a little bit difficult to follow in this teaching approach. So it is not actually a efficient teaching method at all.

Some unavoidable weaknesses of the silent way teaching method make it no longer widely used by teachers all over the world. And some of the theories of this teaching method is could not work out and not practical enough to implement for both teacher and students. Last but not least, this approach could only be applied to a really limited area of language teaching.

#### References

- [1] Gattegno C. (1985). *The Common Sense of Teaching Reading and Writing*. New York: Educational Solutions.
- [2] Gattegno C. (1976). *The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages*. New York: Educational Solutions.

- [3] Stevick, E. W. (1980). *Teaching Languages: A Way and Ways*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House.
- [4] Zhu, Yining. Application of Silent Way in Foreign Language Teaching[J]. *Overseas English*, 2013, (10): 146-148.
- [5] Ji, Lihong. The Silent Way Teaching Method[J]. *Overseas English*, 2011, (12): 139-141.
- [6] Chen, Mingzhu. English Flipped Classroom under the Perspective of Silent Method Teaching Theory [J]. *Journal of Changchun University*, 2016, 26(12): 118-121.
- [7] Li Yuan. Research on the application of flipped classroom teaching method in English teaching[J]. *Journal of Heilongjiang Institute of Education*, 2019, 38(02): 139-141.
- [8] Zeng Xiaoman. An Analysis of Silent Teaching Method[J]. *Research on New Curriculum: Teacher Education (Late)*, 2010(11).