BLOCK 4.
The past meets the present: Language teaching methods in the 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ centuries

Sub-block 4.2.
Humanistic or Holistic methods

Unit 4.2.3. The Silent Way

Outline

1. Objectives of this unit
2. Goal of the Silent Way
3. Historical background of the Silent Way
4. Analysis of the components of the Silent Way
5. Critical assessment of the Silent Way

1. Objectives

1. Understand the origin and roots of the Silent Way.

2. Analyse the Silent Way from the viewpoint of materials design, pedagogical techniques used in the classroom and the principles on which they are based.

3. Critically analyse a real class of the Silent Way.

4. Identify the influence of the Silent Way on CLT and spin-offs.
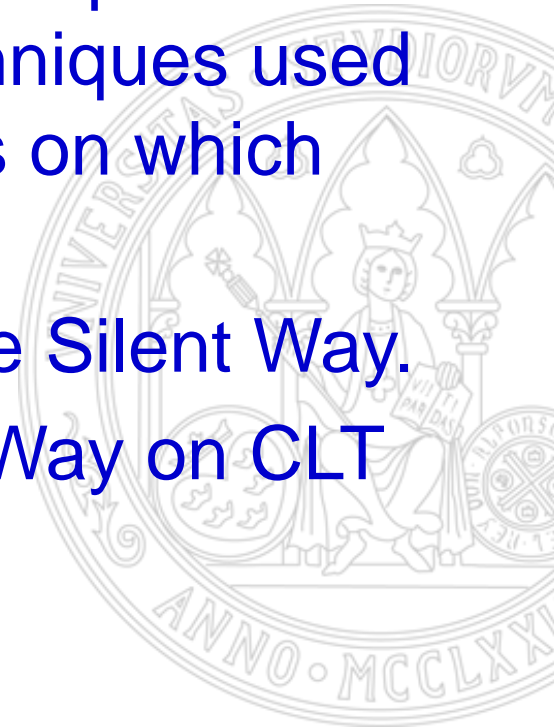
2. Goal of the Silent Way

To attain oral proficiency in basic elements of the target language at a beginning-level
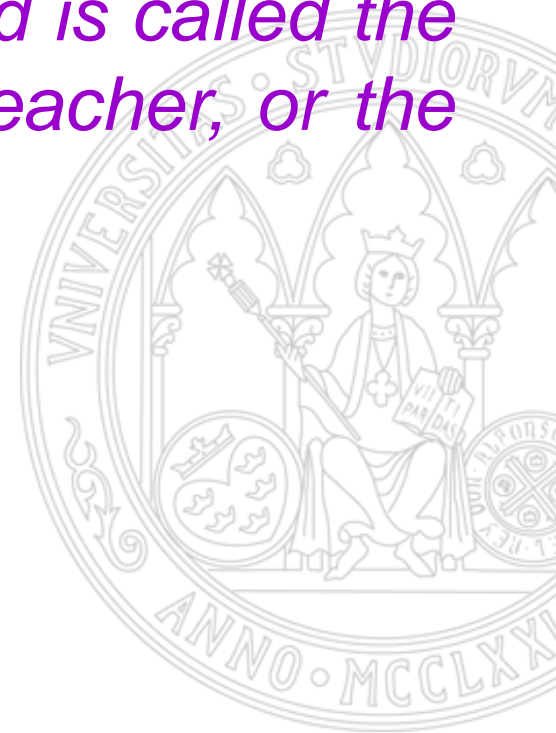
3. Historical background of the Silent Way

Why do you think that this method is called the Silent Way? Who is silent –the teacher, or the student, or both?

1, 2

3. Historical background of the Silent Way

✓ Hypotheses by which the Silent Way is driven (Richards & Rogers, 2001: 81):

1. Learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather than remembers and repeats what is to be learned → inductive learning. Bruner (1966).

2. Learning is facilitated by accompanying (mediating) physical objects (Cuisenaire rods and Fidel charts)

3. Learning is facilitated by problem solving involving the material to be learned → tied to the Cognitive Approach:

Tell me and I forget,

teach me and I remember,

involve me and I learn

(Benjamin Franklin)

4. Analysis of the components of the Silent Way

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

❑ Theory of language (nature of language, including approach to culture)

- Grammar- and lexical-based view of language.
- Spirit of the language: phonological and suprasegmental elements that shape the unique melody of each language
- Culture attached to the spirit of the language spoken by the L2 speakers.
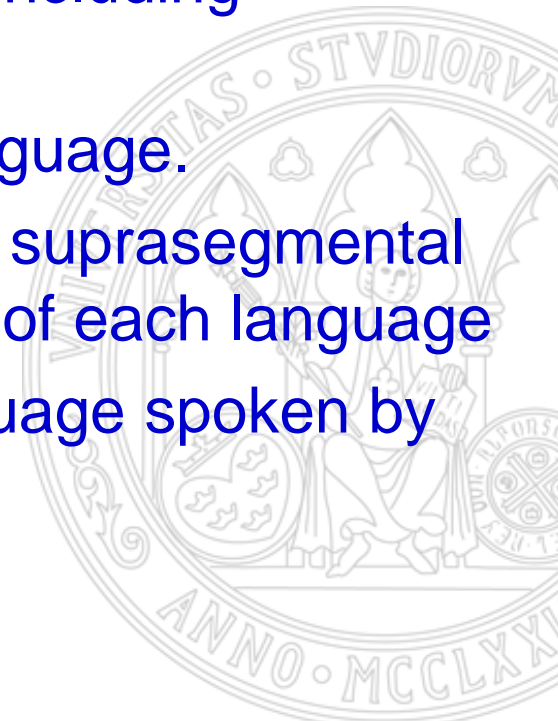
4. Analysis of the components of the Silent Way

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

❑ Theory of learning (learning principles)

- Inductive
- L1 learning $\neq$ L2 learning
- "Artificial approach" and role of silence: most innovative characteristic of the Silent Way
  - ○ Commitment of the self. Silent awareness and active trial
  - ○ The self consists of two systems – a learning system and a retaining system.
  - ○ Self-correction through self-awareness
  - ○ Silence is considered to be the best vehicle for learning

$\downarrow$

"learning to learn" → **"inner criteria"**

4. Analysis of the components of the Silent Way

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

❑ Theory of teaching (pedagogical principles)

- Inductive approach to grammar learning and teaching (practice and inference)
- Sentence as the basic unit of teaching.
- No grammatical explanations
- Formal accuracy is emphasised
- No use of L1 in the classroom
- Teacher is a silent organiser and facilitator of learning
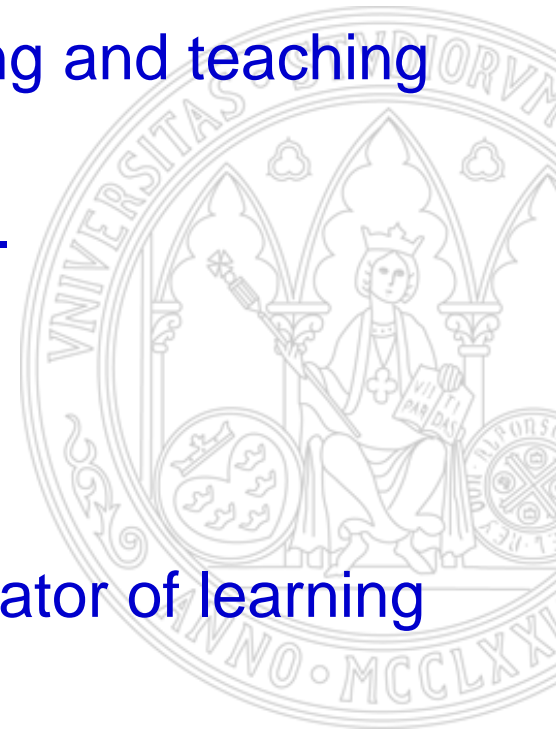
4. Analysis of the components of the Silent Way

Axis 2. The What. Objectives of teaching. Syllabus specifications

- ❑ Model of language: propositional rather than communicative.

- ❑ Emphasised language areas: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation.

- ❑ Structural syllabus. Functional vocabulary as a key to the "spirit" of language.

- ❑ No explicit guidelines for the selection of language, though items are introduced according to their grammatical complexity

- ❑ Emphasised skills: oral (listening and speaking). Order of presentation of skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing.

4. Analysis of the components of the Silent Way

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

❑ Activities

- Guided elicitation exercises directed by the teacher. Responses to commands, questions and visual cues

- Freer communicative exercises without the teacher's previous modelling: learners create their own utterances by putting together old and new information (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 85)

- Pedagogical aids: charts, rods, *realia*, gestures…

4. Analysis of the components of the Silent Way

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

❑ Procedure

The rods were used to introduce vocabulary (colours, numbers, adjectives [long, short, and so on], verbs [give, take, pick up, drop]), and syntax (tense, comparatives, pluralization, word order, and the like). The teacher provided single-word stimuli, or short phrases and sentences once or twice, and then the students refined their understanding and pronunciation among themselves, with minimal corrective feedback from the teacher. The charts introduced pronunciation models and grammatical paradigms.

(Brown, 2000: 106)

4. Analysis of the components of the Silent Way

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

❑ Roles of teacher (including feedback issues)
  ▪ Stevick (1980: 56) defines teacher's tasks in the Silent Way as a) to teach; b) to test; c) to get out of the way.
  ▪ Absence of correction and repeated teacher modelling (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 85)

❑ Roles of students
  ▪ Independent, autonomous and responsible learners. "Inner criteria": Students must make their own generalizations and conclusions.

  As Gattegno says, "The teacher works with the student; the student works on the language" (in Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011: 62).

4. Analysis of the components of the Silent Way

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

- ❑ Roles of instructional materials (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 86):
  - ▪ Facilitating learning as mediating physical objects: association between sound and meaning in the target language.
  - ▪ Learning is facilitated by accompanying (mediating) physical objects, to be manipulated firstly by the teacher and secondly by students:
    - ▪ A set of coloured rods or Cuisenaire rods (small coloured rods of varying lengths)
    - ▪ Colour-coded pronunciation and vocabulary charts
    - ▪ A pointer
    - ▪ Reading and writing exercises. "Visual dictation" (Lado, 1988: 28)

Cuisenaire rods.
Source:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cuisenaire-Rods.jpg
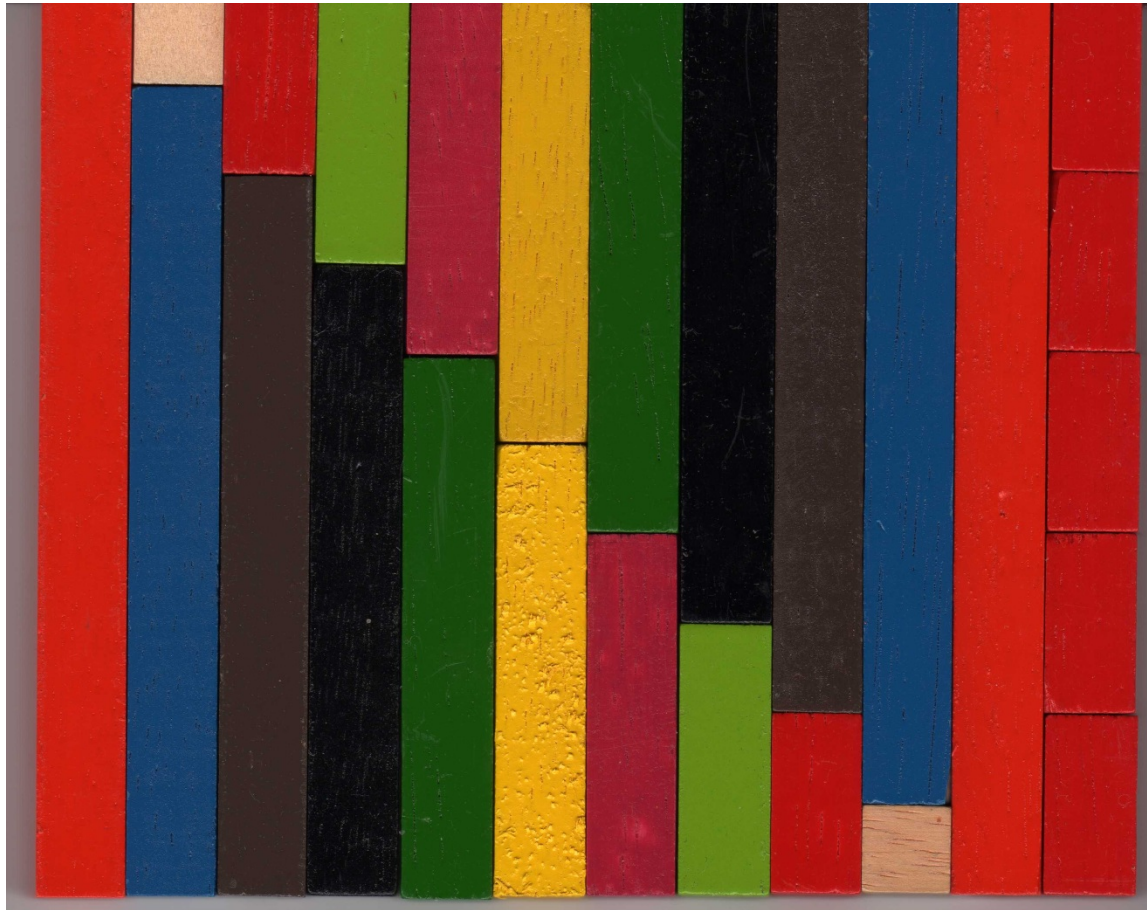
A sound colour chart for English. Used to teach pronunciation
Source:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Silent_Way_English_sound-color_chart.jpg

Copyright © 1977, C. Gattegno   ENGLISH Sound-Color Chart   Educational Solutions, Inc., USA

A Fidel chart for English. Used to teach spealling
Source:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Silent_Way_English_Fidel_chart.jpg

5. Critical assessment of the Silent Way

1) *Which methods does the Silent Way remind you of in terms of teaching objectives, syllabus and sequences?*

2) *Can you think of any positive and negative aspects of the Silent Way?*

3) *Do you think that the Silent Way caters for all students' needs and profiles?*

5. Critical assessment of the Silent Way

❑ **Positive aspects**

Emphasis of the cognitive processes of discovery learning and problem solving

❑ **Negative aspects (Brown, 2000: 106)**

1. A very difficult and demanding role for the teacher (immense creativity on his/her part).

2. Not encouraging a communicative atmosphere.

3. Waste of time in attempting to make students learn or understand without the teacher's voiced clarification

4. Rods and charts are not enough materials for a whole course.

5. Critical assessment of the Silent Way

❑**Influence of the Silent Way on FLT**

- ▪ Direct influence: use of Cuisenaire rods, phonemic charts and pointing to objects and sounds

- ▪ Indirect influence: use of discovery techniques (Harmer, 2007: 89)