

# Discovering The Silent Way

John Pint  
and Susana Pint



ASSOCIATES FOR CREATIVE EDUCATION

Copyright © 2019 by John Pint and Susana Pint  
All rights reserved  
Associates for Creative Education  
Paseo de las Ceibas 172, Pinar de la Venta  
CP 45221 Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico  
RanchoPint@hotmail.com

# Contents

Introduction	1
Foreword	3
Part I: Leo and Liliana: Two Beginners	4
Introducing the Game	6
Looking for the Invisible	8
Working on Liliana	11
Playing with Plurals	13
Grammar Through Rods: A Resume	16
The Second Day	19
Chart One: Pronunciation and Reading	19
Visual Dictation	23
Writing	25
The Story of Ok-Kyung	27
The Numerals	29
Beyond Chart One	33
Getting Out of the Students' Way	38
A Free-Play Revelation	39
The Multiple Uses of the Charts	39
"Post -Paration"	45
Across the Spatial-Preposition Threshold	47
When Rods Are Not Rods:	50
First Steps in Acquiring Luxury Vocabulary	
Liliana's Story	55
PART II: Teaching Spanish to Beginners - A Fourteen-hour Intensive Course	59
A Practical Preface	59

The First Sounds, The First Steps	61
Other Spellings for the Vowel Sounds	66
Words and Sentences with the Vowel Sounds	68
The Consonants	72
Meanings Through Communication	74
The Use of the Rods: A Completely Different Challenge	79
The First Day With the New Group	93
The L and the R: Two Different Sounds	95
Continuing With the Rods	96
Meeting Third-Person Situations	97
Solving a New Problem: Writing	102
Correcting the Sentences	104
The Second Day	110
Following the Students	114
During the Break	115
Back in the Classroom	116
The Verb Estar Contrasted With the Verb Ser (Both Meaning To Be)	120
The End of the Course	126
“What Would You Have Done Afterwards?”	127
And What Next?	127

# Introduction

Some time ago, our friend Mario Rinvoluceri of Pilgrims International Teacher Training asked us whether we would write something for beginning teachers of the Silent Way. Our first reaction was rather negative because all our previous attempts to describe this approach had met with the same fate: the more we wrote, the more we seemed to have left out. Besides, what could we say that had not already been included in the books and articles of Dr. Caleb Gattegno, the author of the Silent Way?

We cautiously abandoned our skepticism only after looking more deeply into the needs of the teachers Mario works with. Having been introduced to the Silent Way through a demonstration or a seminar, they would enthusiastically try the approach, but upon running into difficulties, most of them discovered they were isolated, far from experienced Silent Way teachers whose classrooms they might otherwise visit.

Here, we felt, was a need we might possibly be able to meet by focusing on what we have observed in our own classrooms, by concentrating on individual students and particular groups we have taught, and on the ways they gave themselves to their tasks and then by describing our own struggles, successes and failures to subordinate our conditionings to the realities before us.

So, although we have many years of experience behind us, we have decided not to write about what we know, but rather about some of the events that led to that knowledge, in an attempt to inspire new Silent Way teachers and to share with them a number of problems and questions that are well worth pondering.

We hope that no one will mistake this book for a manual or a program

guide. Just as there are no two students alike, there are no two groups alike. Whatever a good teacher does to help his or her students cannot come from the pages of a book, but only from the problems created by those unique students. For this reason, we are not troubled by what we have omitted. Instead we have hope that the little we have touched on will go a long way, that this book will allow teachers everywhere to “visit” our classrooms without leaving home.

Most of the materials, games, exercises and other teaching strategies presented in this book are not ours, but were originally proposed or developed by Dr. Caleb Gattegno and form part of the approach known as The Silent Way, which is a registered trade mark. Our descriptions, however, are our own interpretation and adaptation of these materials and strategies to the particular circumstances of our own students and teaching situations.

Our deepest thanks to Mario Rinvoluceri who pushed, John Morgan who pulled, Dr. Gattegno who inspired, Clif De Cordoba who provided all-important feedback and to ... who finally made it happen.

John and Susana Pint

# Foreword

When my friends John and Susana Pint asked me to write a word to introduce this text to the public, they did it because I am the originator of the Silent Way. I hesitated in saying yes to their request because I believe their texts do not need any introduction and can stand on their own merit. But their friendly gesture and the sense we three have that the teachers of language can be touched when reading their reports of their classroom activities took care of my inhibitions.

Here we have two practitioners, exposing themselves candidly to their readers and telling of their trepidations and mistakes, sure that these have been as much of value in their evolution as teachers as they could be to their readers and who feel at the same time that they have exciting stories to tell.

As they insist that working in certain ways can be very rewarding and choose to share their gains with colleagues everywhere, we readers can ponder upon their choice of reporting lived experiences rather than engage in a straightforward exposition of ideas they found congenial and fruitful in their case. We agree as we advance in our reading that this choice is also a proof of discipline—indeed, it is left to the reader, all the time, to decide whether his or her sensitivity has been taken into account and no forcing of one's enthusiasm is allowed to distort the evidence.

Like other readers I can state my gratitude to these two generous colleagues who, after so many years of study, came to us with simplicity and only said, "Look at this!"

C. Gattegno  
December 22, 1985

# Part I

## Leo and Liliana: Two Beginners

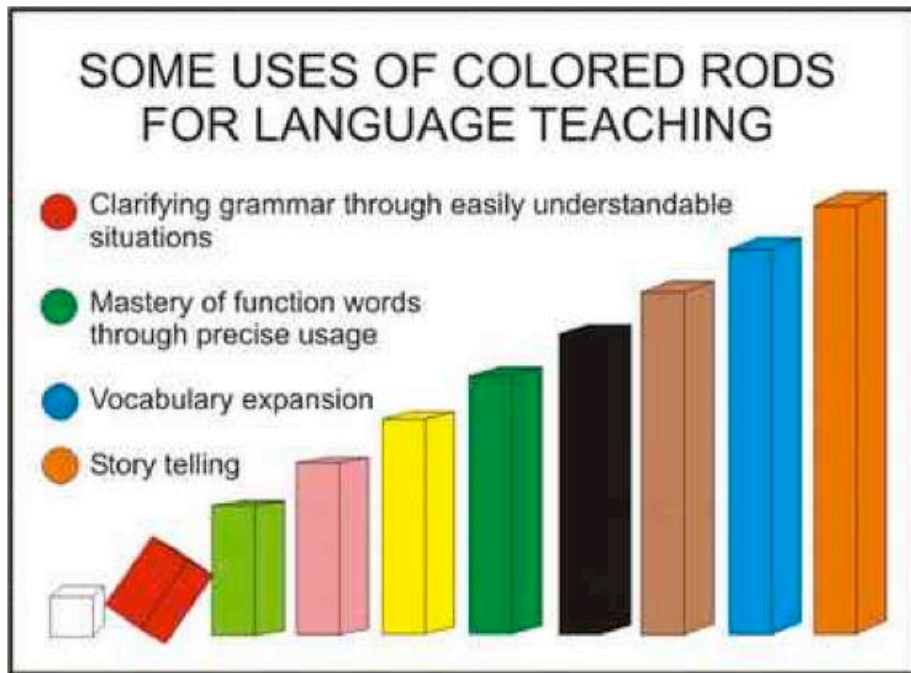
by John Pint

When all the students had been sorted out into various levels, there were two left. One was a middle-aged, grey-suited Austrian with a twinkle in his eye, and the other a shy little woman from Calabria, Italy. They were the only true beginners among the people who had come to Canterbury, England for a two-week, mid-summer English course and it was obvious they were going to need a teacher of their own. In a matter of minutes, I was divested of the level-two group I had been prepared for and assigned to teach Leo and Liliana using the Silent Way, a language- teaching approach based on a worldview that I have been exploring for most of my life.

The Silent Way was originated by Dr. Caleb Gattegno, a truly innovative educator, who was able to transform his extraordinary insights into practical tools for teachers. What Gattegno produced is not a method, but a flexible way of teaching based on careful observation of the workings of the mind. This study has direct classroom applications to Mathematics, Reading, Foreign Language Teaching and many other subjects. The focus is always on *awareness* and at every stage, teaching strategies are modified according to the demands of learning.

Over the years, various games, techniques and tools for learning were invented by Dr. Gattegno and his colleagues, but the day I met Leo and Liliana, the only Silent Way material close at hand was a bagful of colored rods. And it was the way we worked with these rods that put my two new charges on the road to learning English.





Some Uses of Colored Rods

When I teach, I am guided by feedback from the students. Therefore, as I walked in the door, I asked a few questions and attempted a simple conversation, to determine whether these two people were really the beginners others had claimed they were. At the same time, I looked at their faces, hands and postures and listened to their voices to try to find out whether they were tired, nervous, afraid, reluctant, distracted or whatever. They appeared eager, watchful, and definitely beginners, so I immediately started the lesson.

(NOTE: I began this lesson using the approach described in Gattegno's book *Teaching Foreign Languages in Schools—The Silent Way*. There are other ways to begin, for example by working on sounds, using charts that contain colored rectangles or colored columns of spellings representing all the phonemes of the language. Perhaps this description of how to begin with nothing but rods may benefit teachers who hesitate even to experiment with the Silent Way for lack—or fear—of charts.)

## Introducing the Game

I spread a handful of rods on the table around which we were sitting and picked one up, saying, “a rod.” Then I picked up several others, looking at each one and holding it up while saying, “a rod.” When I picked up the next one, I said nothing, but looked expectantly at my students. Leo said, “a rot.” I took another and looked at Liliana. She said something like “rrrote.” I quickly pointed at Leo, who said “a rot” several times. Then Liliana said “a rot” too. Picking up a number of rods, one at a time, I got “a rot” from each of them again and again.

I could accept Leo’s version because it was not far off the mark and contained the schwa sound a at the beginning, which I felt was essential. The mispronunciations were relatively unimportant since, during the first moments of a course, it is necessary for non-native speakers to discover that the game I am inviting them to play is possible, even easy, and that I am offering them a way to communicate in the target language. After that, it is up to me to help them become experimenters with their vocal apparatus: to try putting their tongue into strange new positions to produce an r letting air escape through their teeth for a th; lengthening or shortening sounds to produce the English vowels. Fortunately, I knew we would have dozens of opportunities to work on that during the next hour and many more in the days to come.

I slid the pile of rods to my side of the table, leaving an empty place in the middle, to serve as a kind of stage. I placed a rod there, saying, “a black rod.” I then pointed at it, looking at each of them and getting acceptable versions of the same. So, I proceeded to place a white, a green and a yellow rod on the table, each time hesitating slightly, before saying the proper words, to see if either of them might beat me to it, since it is not unusual for beginners to know a few colors or numbers. But for Leo and Liliana, every single word was a true challenge.

All of this took a minute, but it was a crucial minute during which the ease of the game was demonstrated and the rules were laid out (for example, that the teacher is reluctant to repeat and that the student is obliged to pay close attention). At the same time, I had to watch Leo and

Liliana's first reactions to the rods. Their eyes told me they accepted them, and I even caught a look of relief that said, "We feel like babies in this language and are quite pleased to start with blocks rather than a grammar book."

Perhaps it is time to restate what is emphasized in the introduction to this book. What I did with Leo and Liliana was my interpretation of the Silent Way and was different from that of any other teacher. It was based on the exigencies of the moment and was not a program that I could follow again. Meeting the needs of a new group of students means finding solutions tailored to those needs. For example, when I once taught 40 people sitting in fixed rows, I regularly brought individuals to the front of the room and worked with them before turning to the group as a whole. In the case of teaching children, I tried to create an air of mystery to take advantage of their curiosity and my silence. I can only hope that the story of Leo and Liliana will leave the reader with a feeling for the complexity of creating ad hoc lessons for his or her students and the need for watchfulness at every stage.

As I held up rods of various colors, taken from the pile before me, Leo and Liliana alternated in saying "a blue rod, a brown rod, a black rod, etc." They could name whichever one I lifted, albeit with occasional hesitation and many second starts. Liliana's blue frequently became "blau", which surprised me, since blu is an Italian word. Leo's white would turn into "vite", but we had already reached a point where they would correct themselves at a glance from me, and sometimes even *before* I glanced.

Next I drew the pile close to me and quietly scattered about 15 rods around the table, some standing, some lying on their sides. My aim was partially to avoid monotony, which soon would have occurred if I had continued lifting rods into the air in exactly the same way. I now pointed at a rod here and another there and they began to name them as quickly as they could. This variation of the lifting-one-by-one exercise allowed me to go much faster and to challenge each of them by moving up or down to their maximum speed in naming the rods.

I could see that they were ready to go a step further, so I carefully

gathered all the rods into one pile and pushed it in front of Liliana. These two actions, performed in complete silence, let them know that something new was coming and focused their attention on the right spot. In moments such as this, the burden of responsibility for *looking* and *listening* is clearly placed on the students' shoulders. The fact that the teacher simply moves on to something new without commanding the class to pay attention helps create, from the outset, an atmosphere conducive to learning. "Take a blue rod," I said to Liliana, and she reached out and took one. I was impressed, since this was my first mention of the word take and almost always I have had to physically guide a student's hand through the motions of taking to make the meaning perfectly clear.

"Take a red rod... take a green rod..." Success. Liliana was listening to instructions in a new language and doing just what a native speaker would do. But when I dramatically changed places with her and waited for *her* to give *me* the instructions, she went red with embarrassment and could barely manage to mutter, "a yellow rod" while pointing to the one she wanted me to take. Leo, however, had been observing carefully and had caught that essential first word. "Take a yellow rod," he said boldly.

## **Looking for the Invisible**

The invisible was already becoming visible. I was discovering that Liliana could make great and sometimes unaccountable leaps forward, but was completely unaccustomed to focusing on details, whereas Leo spotted details readily, but would occasionally close his eyes and withdraw, apparently to work out a logical explanation for some new word, while muttering to himself in German.

All of this was vital information I would need in order to do my job as a teacher, which is to work on the students while they work on the language. The "program" for this particular group of students would have to include actions on my part to help Liliana look at or listen to one thing at a time, to focus her attention, while at the same time helping

Leo to suspend judgment and play the game of learning a language which is frequently illogical. Only 15 minutes had gone by, but much had already come to light.

I pushed the pile of rods in front of Leo. As soon as I said, “Take a yellow rod,” he did so, but I quickly added, “and give it to me,” placing my hand before him, palm upward. Wrinkling his brow, Leo carefully repeated this new command: “and ... give ... it ... to ... me,” after which he put the rod in my hand.

I now moved the rods in front of Liliana and gestured to Leo that he should speak to her. Of course, he immediately said, “and give it to me”. I held up both hands, one in front of each student, indicating *stop the action...*



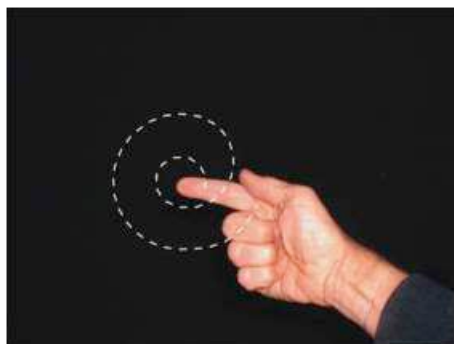
Stop!

...and then mimed taking a rod. A light dawned in Leo’s eyes. Obviously Liliana had to *have* a rod before she could *give* one! “Take a white rod,” said Leo, now with a fine w. Liliana took the right rod and tried to place it in Leo’s outstretched hand. But he quickly withdrew it, shaking his head and lifting his shoulders in a way that meant *wait a minute!* “... and give it to me,” said Leo, opening his hand once more. She did so. Then they both smiled and looked at me as if to say, “We’ve got it—what’s next?”

Naturally, what came next was *practice*. Leo had apparently understood the meanings of the two commands. If so, he needed to move from his new awareness to the familiarity that comes with usage. As for Liliana,

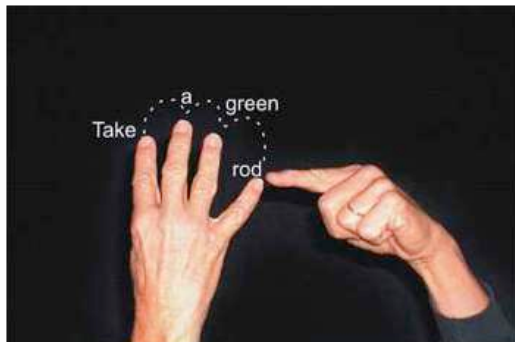
I had no idea what, if anything, she had grasped. To give her another chance to watch the sequence of words and actions, I slid the rods in front of myself and gestured to Leo to give me the orders.

“Take a green rot... and give it to me.” I did so and gestured for him to go on to another color. “Take a brown rot—” I held up my hand, shook my head no and then cupped my hand to my ear while making a circular movement with my outstretched index finger. This movement they would soon associate with *repeat it*.



Please repeat

Leo caught the idea and started again, but I immediately stopped him and gestured that he should speak very *slowly*. I then held up four fingers. As he said, “Take ... a ... green ... rot,” I pointed to each finger, one word per finger. Then I tapped the finger representing “rot”



One word per finger

and shook my head with a look that said no good. “Rot ... rot ...,” said Leo, mystified. I again shook my head and looked at Liliana. “Rote?” she offered. No, I gestured. “R-rode?” she said. I smiled and made the *repeat* gesture. As she said the word, I opened my mouth wide, at the same time indicating something similar with the thumb and index finger of one hand.



Open wider, please!

A passable “rod” resulted and I turned back to Leo. “Rot—no, rod, rod-rod-rod-rod,” he repeated, as if hammering a nail. When he seemed satisfied, I held up the four fingers again. “Take a green rot... er, rod,” he said triumphantly—and I quickly grabbed one—“and give it to me!”

Since Leo now had something new to work on (and, in fact, he had to self-correct his “rot” rather frequently) he happily went through all the colors, with Liliana and me following his commands.

## Working on Liliana

At last, I turned toward Liliana. Speak to me, I gestured. Very slowly and quietly, she said, “Take a blue rod,” which I did. Then she turned toward Leo with a look that said, Now comes your part. But I quickly cupped my hand to my ear and looked straight into her eyes. To make things even clearer, I opened her clenched fist palm upward and dangled the blue rod above it. “G-give me,” she said. I shook my head. She tried

“Give-a me,” and again I held back the rod. Then she looked at Leo with pleading eyes. “Give it to me,” he said, and so, I immediately gave it to *him*, not to Liliana. All three of us laughed and I then used the put-the-words-on-the-fingers technique to help Liliana focus on what she was missing. She soon could do as well as Leo, except for the and in and give it to me which she kept dropping, right from the start. This wouldn’t have bothered me, since she was treating the two commands as two separate sentences, but Leo, being a true stickler for details, made her insert the word every time. Liliana, however, persisted in forgetting it up until we worked on a green rod and a red rod, when the meaning of and apparently came to her. After that it was hers, and she used it to link both nouns and clauses.

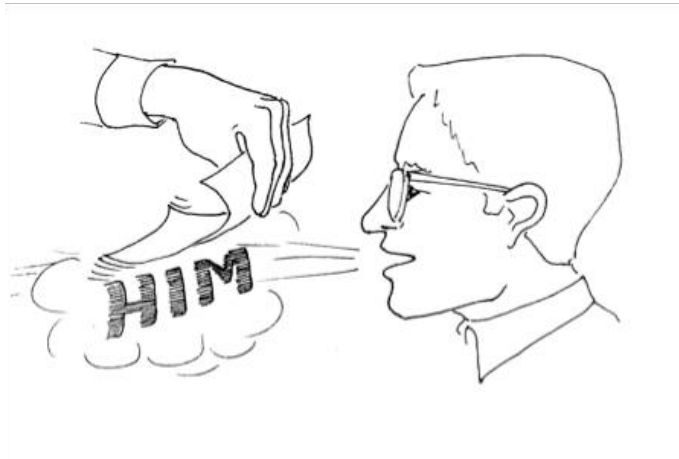
The expression give it to me was probably first perceived as one long word which, when spoken, produced a reward: the reception of a rod. But, little by little, they became aware that this “long word” had replaceable parts. This happened as soon as we moved on to something new. Liliana had the rods, so I told her, “Take a black rod and give it to him,” pointing at Leo. She handed it to him and Leo immediately tried out the new variation, with me as the recipient. Then Liliana tried, but her first “him” came out “im”, so I had her listen carefully to Leo’s pronunciation of the word. She then attempted an h that was practically inaudible, so I dangled a piece of paper in front of Leo’s mouth and he graciously complied with a truly germanic, hurricane-like “him!”

Producing strange, unmusical sounds with a piece of paper before her mouth was clearly taking Liliana a giant step away from her normal comportment. Flustered, but determined not to give up, she tried again and again until the paper finally moved and she had said her first “him.” Once the sound had passed her lips, it was my job to remind her to use it every time she omitted it, which was very often. At first I used the *repeat* gesture, with the intention of indicating which word she had said incorrectly, but she was usually able to beat me to the punch, and soon a mere glance was sufficient to do the job.

Give it to her followed, but in this case only Leo and I could use it. To give Liliana a chance, I added several women to the class in the form of “stick persons” on slips of paper. When Leo told Liliana to give it to



her, pointing to one of the drawings, Liliana would place the rod on the hand of the stick woman in question. I soon added several men to the “family”, and pushed back my chair to let my students have as much practice as they wanted. With several colors and me, him and her at their disposal, there were enough variables to keep them from getting bored. Meanwhile, they each had a number of tricky sounds they needed to produce properly, combine with other sounds and remember to use.

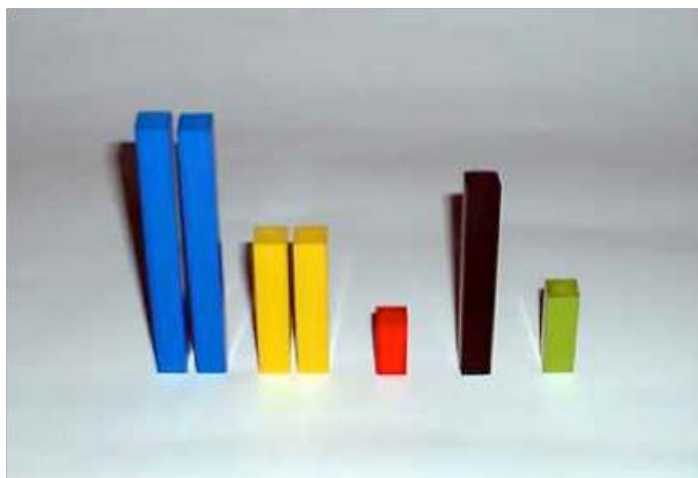


## Playing with Plurals

When they gave me a look that said, “We’re ready for something new,” I pushed the pile of rods off to one side, picked out two green ones and solemnly placed them in the center of the table. Both students were watching intently. I said nothing, but glanced at each of them with a quizzical look, as if to say, “What are these?” Leo offered, “a green rod,” but I shook my head. Had one of them said, “two green rods,” I would have used their words as the formal introduction of something new. But because they said nothing, I spoke the words. Both of them immediately tried to say the same, but had difficulties with rods. I put up three fingers and used the fingers-for-words technique to pinpoint the problem. They readily experimented with various noises until they came upon a version I could accept. I indicated their success by going on to place another pair of rods next to the red ones. We soon had all

the colors out, with me rapidly pointing from one pair to another and Leo and Liliana naming each as fast as they could.

When their proficiency indicated that this was no longer a challenge and could have become boring, I took a handful of rods and placed one here and one there among the pairs. Again I randomly pointed from one to another:



“Two blue rods, a red rod,  
two yellow rods, a black rod...”

This simple change added quite a new twist to the challenge. They had to remember to put the s on rod for the plural and put in that hard-to-pronounce a for the singular. When concentrating on doing this, they tended to revert to their original, now unacceptable pronunciations of the colors or rod. Getting all this together well enough to be able to name one thing after another without a mistake raised perspiration on their brows. Such an apparently simple thing was so damnably full of pitfalls! And to make matters worse, I continued to urge them—through my gestures—to go even faster.

Perhaps I wore them out, because something in the next stage of the game failed to click. I put all the rods back together in one pile, pushed it in front of Liliana and gestured for Leo to speak. “Take a blue rod and

give it to me,” he said and Liliana did so quite happily. But I had hoped he would have asked for *two* rods, and I now indicated this by raising two fingers and pointing at the pile. “Take two red rods,” said Leo, “and give it —” here I cut him off and tried to use the finger technique to isolate it. But this turned out to be rather difficult. Upon reflecting, I can see that I was thinking of it as a separate word, while they apparently were not. But eventually we did isolate it and I gave them them as a replacement which they proceeded to use, albeit with a look of doubt in their eyes:



“Take two white rods  
and give them to me/her/him.”

All went well until we returned to taking a single rod. They both merrily produced: take a pink rod and give them to him. My negative head-shake led them back to it and I then tried to set up alternating situations in which one rod and then two had to be taken and given. Unfortunately, it was here that I made a colossal mistake. To “help” them see that them refers to the plural, I drew two stick people on one sheet of paper and told Leo, “Take a red rod and give it to them.” This, and the inevitable give them to them which usually delights my students, left Leo and Liliana cold. In fact, from this point on they tried their best to do without both it and them, attempting sentences like Give me. Only on the third morning, after these words had been met again and again, did


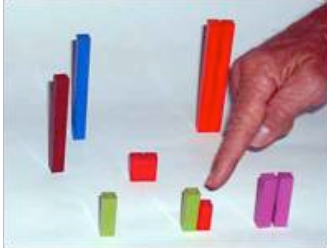
the moment of awareness come, and what sparked it I do not know. But for quite some time after that, there was a ring of pride in their voices every time they said “it” or “them” and they could immediately self-correct the omission of these important pronouns with no need for me to point out in what part of the sentence their mistake lay.


What power there is in resolving one’s own problem! Students of English as a Foreign Language are given explanations and translations of it and them and then blissfully go on omitting or ignoring them in their speech or writing, perhaps for the rest of their lives. Leo and Liliana experienced a relatively short period of confusion which forced them to notice these words, to wonder about them, and then, because a way out of the confusion was always available, they themselves made sense of them. Instead of remembering someone else’s grammar rule, they invented their own.

## Grammar Through Rods: A Resume

During the first three hours, my students met and worked on the following, in order of presentation (new elements are underlined)

<u>a rod</u>	
a <u>white</u> rod, a <u>red</u> rod, a <u>green</u> rod, a <u>pink</u> rod, a <u>yellow</u> rod, a <u>black</u> rod, a <u>brown</u> rod, a <u>blue</u> rod	I deliberately postponed using the orange rod, which takes <u>an</u> , due to what I already sensed about these two students’ inner blocks. I also put off a <u>dark green rod</u> , a <u>light green rod</u> until the right moment would come along.
<u>Take</u> a white rod.	

<p>Take a black rod <u>and give it to me.</u></p> <p>Give it to <u>her.</u></p> <p>Give it to <u>him.</u></p>	<p>Having only two students, I increased the size of the class with drawings of stick people on slips of paper. They could then tell each other to give rods to these additional “persons.”</p> 
<p><u>two green rods</u></p> <p>a red rod <u>and</u> a pink rod.</p>	<p>With other students, I might have introduced the pronoun <u>one</u> (<u>and a pink one</u>), but I felt it would have overwhelmed Leo and Liliana at this stage.</p>
<p>two red rods</p> <p>A pink rod</p> <p>A blue rod and a black rod</p>	<p>Nothing new is introduced here, but the students now had to use <u>a</u>, the plural, or <u>and</u>, depending on which set-up I pointed to. I jumped from one to another quickly, to ascertain their degree of mastery and find out whether we could go on.</p>  <p>“a green rod and a red rod”</p>

<p>Take two green rods and give <u>them</u> to me.</p>	
<p>Give them to her. Give them to him. Give them <u>to them</u>.</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">“Give them to them!”</p>
<p><u>an</u> orange rod</p>	<p>Physically separating the orange one from the others helped to indicate there was something special about it.</p>
<p>Take a pink rod and <u>put</u> it <u>here</u>.</p>	<p>These are the first students I have ever had who didn't immediately understand <u>here</u> and <u>there</u>, even though the <u>heres</u> I used were very close to them and the <u>theres</u> were on the other side of the room. I still wonder why.</p>
<p>Put it <u>there</u>. Put them there.</p>	
<p>Give it to me. <u>Thank you!</u></p>	
<p><u>three</u> red rods, <u>four</u> red rods, <u>five</u> red rods, <u>six</u> red rods, <u>seven</u> red rods, <u>eight</u> red rods, <u>nine</u> red rods, <u>ten</u> red rods</p>	<p>Liliana was the first person I had come across in my teaching career who didn't know a single number in English. She worked on each one with great care and wonder and mastered most of them, on top of all the other work we had done that morning. Curiously, it was the number <u>ten</u> she found most difficult to retain!</p>

Leo was addicted to writing. I persuaded him to put aside his pen and paper the first morning, but at the end of the class, he stopped me, and, using an ingenious combination of gestures and the Italian word *scrivere*, made me promise to start off with writing the following morning. I immediately agreed. I had something in mind that would satisfy his writing needs as well as several other needs Leo wasn't yet aware of.

Four and a half hours had passed. Much had been accomplished. Much had been revealed. And the enthusiasm evident in my students' faces and bodies communicated to me their confidence that *they could do it*, that the door to learning English was open to them.

## **The Second Day**

There are wonderful things about the second morning of a Silent way course. Whenever I ask students if they remember anything, a few swear they've forgotten every word and many others seem confused as they look into some inner receptacle and find it apparently empty. But I know why this search of their memories is useless. Everything done the day before was done through usage rather than memorization. So the moment I hold up a rod, it all comes back, inevitably more precise than yesterday, due to the benefits of a good night's sleep. In fact, because I am aware that a sorting-out process goes on during sleep, I dispense with reviewing altogether and take up right where we left off before.

Leo and Liliana, who had found an enormous challenge in almost every word they had worked on the day before, now experienced the exhilarating discovery that they not only "remembered" these words, but had internalized them to such a degree that the same words and structures were now available to them as tools for further investigation of the language. They were beginning to build an unshakeable framework upon which they could later hang less important items of grammar and syntax.

## **Chart One: Pronunciation and Reading**

The summer English courses taught at the University of Kent are conducted through that highly resourceful organization known as Pilgrims. In less than a day they were able to provide me with a set of Silent way Word Charts, which I decided to use the very next morning.



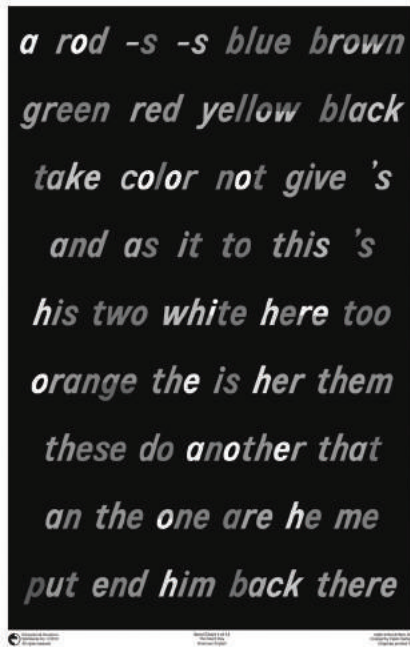


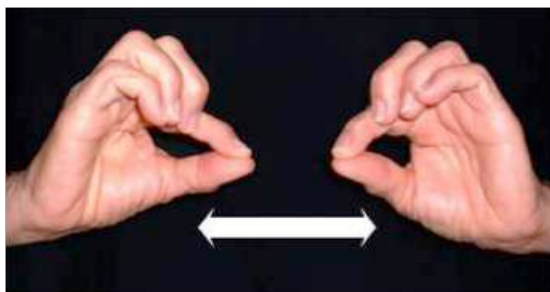
Chart 1

There are 12 Word Charts for teaching English the Silent Way. They contain the functional words everyone needs for mastering the language. Color-coding indicates pronunciation. Like other Silent Way materials, they are multipurpose tools.

In some cases there are advantages in delaying the first use of the charts, for example with students who have acquired the unfortunate habit of relying on English spelling to guide them in their pronunciation. As for Leo and Liliana, I knew that the color coding on the charts would give them—right from the start—an honest picture of the treachery of English spelling, along with a system by which they could figure out the true pronunciation without my help. In addition, I would have in my hands a highly versatile tool with which I could pinpoint sound that my students needed to work on and also add reading and writing to our activities.

I put up the first Word Chart and pointed to some of the words they had

met orally the day before. We were immediately involved in intensive pronunciation work. For example, they weren't making the ee in green as long as it should be. I isolated these letters, which are colored-coded bright red, by covering the gr and n with my hands. Then I waited for them to pronounce this sound alone. When they did, I shook my head "no" and had them try again. This time I "plucked" the sound out of the air and "stretched" it with a pulling gesture.



They were soon producing an ee sound twice as long as the previous version. I then pointed to other red e's (in me and here) so they could practice making the longer sound.

Their black sounded more like "block". I isolated the a simply by tapping it and encouraged them to try various pronunciations. The results were quite far off the mark, until they saw me pinch my nose. "Black?" asked Leo. I smiled and turned to Liliana. She said nothing, so I gestured for her to listen to Leo. "Black," she said. Then I quickly pointed to and on the chart, which they pronounced "ahnd" in unison. A quick return to black: they said it correctly. Then I cut off the bl with one hand. We rapidly jumped from ack to black several times and then went down to and. After that, quickly from black to back to and and back to black.

Pointing to the white o's in rod and not got Liliana into an experimenting frame of mind. She invented several kinds of o's and eventually came up with one that sounded British to me. "That's it!" I indicated, and she stuck to that sound throughout the course, while Leo later discovered some of the differences between British and American pronunciation and then switched to the latter.

So we minutely examined other words on the chart, and each time they ran into pronunciation problems, we looked for the same sound (therefore, the same color) in a word they had already pronounced well. They were amazed, for example, to see that the ue in blue was color-coded the same as wo in two and o in to. A problem with the th in there sent us right back to them. Once there sounded okay, I could flick the pointer back and forth between the two words and my students would try their best to say them as quickly as possible.

## Visual Dictation

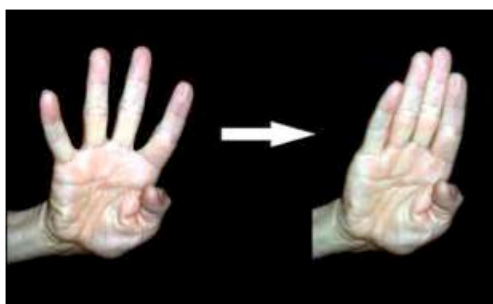
Next, we shifted to reading, still referring to the same chart. Using the pointer, I touched three words in sequence and they said “a yellow rod.” Then I made variations of the same phrase, only changing the colors: a black rod a white rod, etc. They quickly discovered that they had to be looking at the chart *before* I began a new phrase or they would get confused.

At first, they tried to say each word aloud as I touched it. Had I allowed this, it would have defeated one of the purposes of visual dictation, which is to use *meaning* as a guide for connecting a number of words momentarily stored in the “mind’s eye”. Holding up one hand to indicate *stop*, while tapping out the next phrase, made it clear that they had to wait until I lowered the pointer before saying what they had seen or what they thought they had seen.

I now built on the variations we had just done by adding a few words: Take a red rod, Take a green rod, etc., giving them plenty of time to piece each sentence together in their minds. Both of them tended to put pauses between words:

take ... a ... brown ... rod

So I “placed” these words on four fingers, then brought them together quickly while making a “speed it up” gesture.



“Take a brown rod!” they shouted together.

After that we worked on many other meaningful combinations of two or three words. Soon I was tapping out long sentences like:

Take a blue rod, a black rod  
and two yellow rods and give  
them to him.

As soon as I finished, they would say the sentence, and now their intonation indicated that it meant something to them. If they slipped up on the recent work in pronunciation, I had only to point to the offending word on the chart to get a self-correction, after which I normally had them redo the entire sentence. Their satisfaction in having produced such long utterances correctly was evident and there was no need for me to say “good” or to give them a mark. That kind of academic reward would have seemed totally out of place in the frank relationship we had already created for ourselves.

The fact that they could retain a string of words connected by the fleeting movement of a pointer told me that they knew the meanings of the individual words and the sentence as a whole. When they had a problem, I inevitably discovered a still-not-understood word at the bottom of it. Here and there, for example, were not fully understood. So we immediately shifted from the chart to the rods to work on the problem and then back to the chart.

## Writing

But I had promised them a chance to write, so I pointed to their notebooks and mimed *writing*. Leo beamed. I tapped out both long and short phrases and sentences, waiting after each one for as long as they wanted. Of course, they immediately discovered they had to follow the same discipline used for reading aloud. If they tried to write even one word while I was tapping out the sentence, they were lost...

a blue rod

a white rod

a brown rod

etc.

A blue rod and a yellow rod

a red rod and a brown rod

etc.

two red rods

two black rods

etc.

Take a blue rod.

Take a yellow rod.

etc.

Take a black rod and give it to me.

Take a black rod and give it to him.

Take a green rod and give it to her.

Now, in addition to problems like word order, plurals and correct forms, they also had to pay attention to spelling that apparently had little correspondence to the pronunciations they had just begun to master. Writing may appear to be a simple task, but my students' efforts revealed a little of the complexity of this skill we all take for granted:

Liliana's eyes methodically moving up and down from chart to paper as she painstakingly writes each separate letter, then reads the entire sentence, oohing and aahing when she finds a word misplaced or omitted.

Leo peering at the chart, brow knit with furious concentration as he dashes off a scribbled sentence ... then mysteriously withdrawing, quietly muttering as he ponders what he has written, occasionally scratching out a word and hurriedly replacing it with a new scrawl.

When they had written more than half a page, I stopped the visual dictation and gestured for each of them to look at the other's sentences. It was amazing that almost always what Liliana had got wrong, Leo had got right, and vice-versa. When they seemed satisfied that they had found all the mistakes, I walked round to the side of the table, read their sentences and underlined a few words (or spaces between words). For example:

take a wite rod and give it to him \_\_\_

Again, working together without my help, they figured out and corrected all the errors I had marked, including the punctuation and capitalization, which, until now, we had ignored.

At the end, I had them read aloud all of their sentences. This gave them pleasure. In their hands they had a visible record of what we had done together, a way of demonstrating to others or to themselves, just how much they could now read, write and say in English.

As the days passed, the number of visually-dictated sentences grew and one day Liliana confided to me (by then she had discovered I understood Italian) that her husband, an intermediate-level student of English, was reading her sentences and running into grammar points

he had never understood. How proud she was to tell me that she could not only explain the “rules” (which we had never discussed) but could also demonstrate shades of meaning visibly, using small objects in the way we had used rods! From her comments, I could see that the powerful effects of learning through awareness were already having an effect on her self-confidence and had, indeed, gone beyond the walls of the classroom.

The change slowly taking place in Liliana reminded me of the case of Ok-Kyung, a Korean woman who once studied Spanish with my wife, Susy. Here is a transcript of our taped recollections of what happened...

## **The Story of Ok-Kyung**

### **Susana:**

When we were in Korea, I was working with a group of beginners and among them there was a girl who was always afraid to say anything in Spanish. Every time she tried to say the simplest sentence or had to manipulate the rods, she would get so nervous she would shake. At that time I had already learned not to force students to do things, so I invited her to participate actively only when I really felt that she was prepared to do it.

One day I sat down with her and tried to find out something more about her. She told me that she was an only daughter and that she had one brother who was a brilliant student at the university. So she felt that at home they looked down at her because she was not as brilliant as her brother. Obviously, because she was a woman in a society where women play a second-class role, she felt very, very insecure. So, at least, I then understood a little bit about her lack of confidence.

The class went on and, little by little, she started to improve, and one day she was as good as everyone else. From that point on, she was completely different. She seemed full of life and many times she would initiate activities instead of waiting for someone else to start.

**John:**

Why do you think this change came about?

**Susana:**

Well, part of it is not forcing the students but just waiting and letting them absorb things. Then there is the fact that we give them all the time necessary to become masters of each small sector of the language. We always get down to details and work on things with great precision. Or I should say *they* do this work, and eventually they become authorities in each of these little fields, like the spatial prepositions, for example, and they don't have to depend on remembering rules or the words of an outside authority.

**John:**

Yes, what they experience is a series of successes that keep building up their own inner criteria. They reach knowledge through a direct route, from their own personal experience.

**Susana:**

I think that's it. The students reach a point where they can speak with authority..., they tell me "This doesn't sound right" using the same sense of truth that I employ.

**John:**

I'd like to add a word to the story of Ok-Kyung, from the point of view of an outside observer. I used to pass by while the class was going on, since it was held in our home, and I recall that when the class first began, Ok-Kyung used to sit apart from the others. Her chair was always as far as possible from the table and she clearly looked out of place. Then, after this change took place, she not only moved her chair closer, but even her posture changed. She was sitting up straight, speaking loudly and using remarkably good Spanish.

Not long afterward, Ok-Kyung asked me to help her order the Silent



Way English Charts. She said she was going to start teaching English in her apartment building. So we helped her to get the charts and she actually did put up announcements and began to teach English. Now, we thought this was quite amazing because Qk-Kyung's English was not too great. There was an enormous difference between her Spanish and her English, even though she had supposedly been speaking English for years.

**Susana:**

Something very dramatic had happened to her. In fact, years later, after we had left Korea, I received a letter from Ok-Kyung. She proudly told me that she had gone back to the university, even though she had got married in the meantime, and that shortly she was going to receive her master's degree in foreign language teaching.

## **The Numerals**

I first tried to teach the numerals in 1970, expecting something wonderful to happen. I had read Dr. Gattegno's comments on the many benefits of introducing the entire number system at an early stage, but when I tried to do it in Mexico, by putting up the numeral chart and tapping out various number-combinations, my students were distinctly unimpressed.

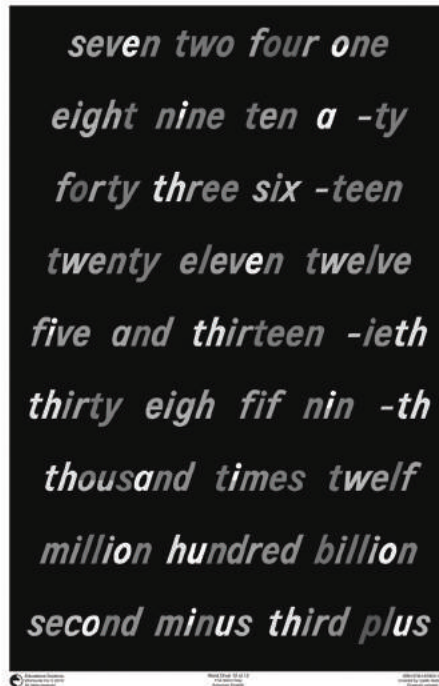


Chart 12: The Numerals

By using the pointer to connect words or parts of words, one can make everything from 1 to 999,999,999,999 as well as ordinals, fractions and math statements.

The following summer, however, I had the good fortune to walk ‘into a room where Dr. Gattegno was teaching Spanish to a large group of New York City school principals. While adding an 8 to a string of numerals on the black board, he said “ocho” only one time, then quickly pointed to 2.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

The group shouted “dos’. Suddenly the pointer flicked back to the 8 and a few, soon all, said “ocho”. Immediately he was off again, pointing to each of the others, but not in order and always so quickly that the

participants were kept perched on the edges of their chairs. After a short time, the board looked something like this:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900
1000	2000	3000	4000	5000	6000	7000	8000	9000

Within minutes the group was following the movement of the silent teacher's pointer from 9000 to 800 to 70 to 6 and shouting out: "nueve mil, ochocientos setenta y seis" (9,876). And with such glee!

He had said very little. They, like children learning their native tongue, had found the regularities in the system and had applied them as widely as possible. From their knowledge of seis they had worked out seis mil, seiscientos and even sesenta, which is irregular, by themselves. I was amazed at how simple, yet powerful this approach was. But I wonder if it would have struck me that way had I not first struggled in vain to find it myself. Later, I saw or gave many Silent Way demonstrations in which groups of people, sometimes up to one hundred at a time, worked out the number systems of various languages in half an hour to 45 minutes... but I doubt if any of the participants were as enchanted with what was happening as I was that summer in New York, long ago.

By the time I was ready to put the numeral scheme on the blackboard for Leo and Liliana, I had discovered that there are both clear and confusing ways to do it. Some of the numerals in the 10 20 30 line are regular in English and some are not. Which ones should you present first? I decided to give them ninety and let them apply the -y ending to the others. We all had great fun when they created "two-ty" and had to abandon it for the much less meaningful "twenty".

How would you make the teens in the scheme above? It may not be immediately evident that they *can* be made. I find that practicing such things in advance is important for my own understanding of the number

system I am attempting to teach. In English, for example, I had to find a way to show that and is acceptable in 101 but not in 5,500. Playing with the system at home helps.

Two people studying the number system are not the same as a dozen or a hundred. When I work with a large group I realize that each bit of information I put into circulation will probably be retained by at least one person in the room. So I don't have to repeat. I simply point to the number, color, or situation in question and let the knowers shout it out for the benefit of all. Thus, we can charge ahead as a group. This is typical of most Silent Way classes I have taught or observed. There is little or no pressure on the individual member of a large group. He or she can fade in or out at will. Once new material has been put into circulation, other techniques can be used to provide the entire group with adequate practice of that material.

Tutoring one or two students is different. I need to be very sensitive to the individual's energy level and mood as well as the demands I am making upon him or her. I failed to notice the point where I lost Leo and Liliana. We were well into the number system when I realized I was not doing my proper job, which is paying attention to the invisible, to what is going on within the students. When I noticed it, they were already drained of energy. In retrospect, I see that my old nemesis, the *lesson plan* had led me astray. I had planned the visual dictation, with which we had started the day, as an easy activity, a pleasant and different way to bring back yesterday's work. But in reality, I had given my students several major challenges to deal with. They had succeeded admirably and were now ready for something more restful than conquering the entire numeral system in a half-hour's time. Yet I went ahead as if these two were false beginners who had been drilled in the English numbers from childhood on. I should have recalled just how complex the "simplest" things really are.

Leo found it difficult to hold on to fifty and fifteen, frequently slipping over to "five-ty" and "five-teen", and Liliana found herself overwhelmed by what must have seemed to her a tongue-twister conspiracy. The sounds th and er were major hurdles, and pronouncing an h anywhere required a mobilization of her whole self. Each time she came to one,

she had to call upon all her resources, as if she were a surgeon about to perform a heart transplant for the first time. So what was she to do, when her teacher calmly pointed to 3333: three thousand three hundred and thirty-three ?

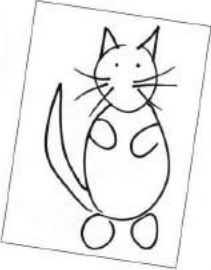
So we left the study of the numerals incomplete, took a break, and then went on to other things. The following morning saw us all working on the same subject again, but with new vigor and far fewer problems.

## **Beyond Chart One**

We had spent something like ten hours working on a variety of structures and situations built around the commands give take, and put. During this period of time I saw Leo and Liliana acquire an inner discipline and watchfulness that turned them into language-learning “pros.” They had gone deeply into the sounds of English and had taken the time needed to find and practice the ones they found difficult; they had experimented with putting words together until they acquired a sense of the logic of English; they had got used to looking and listening carefully and had accepted precision as the watchword for every step along the way.

Having built themselves a foundation consisting of new awarenesses about English and perhaps about themselves they now appeared ready to construct a framework upon it. The following are descriptions of several situations I—or we—set up during the succeeding classes in order to continue studying English grammar without interference from translations, overdoses of vocabulary or rules out of books.

1.	<p><u>This</u> rod <u>is</u> blue.</p> <p><u>That</u> rod is red.</p> <p><u>This one</u> is black.</p> <p><u>These</u> rods are pink.</p> <p><u>Those</u> are brown.</p>	<p>At first I used only a few rods: some close to the students, others as far away as possible. I moved these back and forth until I was sure they had caught the idea . Then I placed more and more rods in different parts of the room until I had about twenty groups (or single rods) that I could point to in rapid succession.</p>
2.	<p><u>My</u> rod is yellow.</p> <p><u>Your</u> rod is red.</p> <p><u>His</u> / <u>her</u> rods are green.</p> <p>Take her rods.</p> <p>My <u>name</u> is Leo, etc.</p> <p><u>Our</u> rods are pink.</p> <p>Our rod is pink.</p> <p><u>Your</u> (p1) rods are blue.</p> <p><u>Their</u> rod is orange.</p>	<p>We began by holding the rods in our hands. Once the concept of possession was clear, we added stickman drawings for variety.</p> <p>“His rods are dark green.”</p> <p><u>Our</u> was indicated by having Leo and Liliana hold each end of a rod. Drawings of stick men and women in different combinations showed that, in English, <u>their</u> applied to all.</p>
3.	<p><u>Your</u> rod is orange and mine is red.</p> <p><u>Yours</u> is black.</p> <p><u>His</u> is blue.</p> <p><u>Hers</u> are white.</p> <p><u>Ours</u> are light green and <u>theirs</u> are dark green.</p>	<p>Expecting some confusion, I postponed the presentation of these pronouns until the day after we had worked on <u>my</u>, <u>your</u>, etc. Leo and Liliana, however, had not been informed that they were “difficult,” and mastered everything in moments. Once again, the teacher’s expectation failed to match reality.</p>

4.	<p>Her rod is brown.</p> <p>His rod is brown, <u>too</u>.</p>	<p>“My rods are black.”</p> <p>“Mine are black, too!”</p>
5.	<p><u>What color</u> is your rod?</p> <p>Blue!</p> <p>These rods are <u>the same</u> color.</p> <p>My rod is the same color <u>as</u> yours.</p> <p>Their rods are <u>different</u> colors.</p> <p>This rod is a different color <u>than</u> that one.</p>	<p><u>Your, this</u>, etc. which were just taught above, are now used as stepping stones for conquering another sector of the language.</p> <p>“His is the same color as his.”</p>
6.	<p><u>I have</u> five rods.</p> <p><u>You</u> have three.</p> <p><u>He / she has</u> a green rod.</p> <p><u>We / you / they</u> have _____ rods.</p> <p><u>It</u> has a blue one.</p>	 <p>“It” was a drawing of a cat.</p>
7.	<p>How many rods <u>have you</u>?</p>	<p>Because we were in England, I used the interrogative form of <u>have</u> that the British like to teach, but often forget to use. Ordinarily, I start beginners out with <u>Do you have</u>, <u>Does he have</u>? because the students can apply <u>do</u> and <u>does</u> to other verbs.</p> <p>“How many rods has John?”</p>

8.	<p><u>Stand up!</u></p> <p><u>Come here!</u></p> <p>Come here <u>quickly!</u></p> <p><u>Go</u> to the door!</p> <p>Come <u>back!</u></p> <p>Come back <u>slowly!</u></p> <p>Take three rods!</p> <p>Put them back!</p> <p><u>Sit down!</u></p> <p><u>Tell him to go</u> to the table; tell him to...</p>	<p>The way we played the game, the one who was given a series of commands had to get up and carry them out exactly, while the others watched for slip-ups. Great fun!</p> <p>“Tell Liliana to take five rods and to come back quickly.”</p>
9.	<p><u>Give me some</u> rods.</p> <p>Give her <u>a few</u>.</p> <p>Give him <u>a lot of</u> rods.</p>	<p>“Give some to her, a few to him, and <u>a lot</u> to me!”</p>
10.	<p>I have two rods. <u>One</u> is blue and <u>the other</u> is black.</p>	



	<p>Two are orange and the <u>others</u> are green.</p> <p>One is red <u>another</u> is yellow, another brown, and the other is white.</p> <p>She has two rods. <u>Both of them</u> are pink.</p> <p>We have seventeen rods. <u>All of them</u> are white.</p>	<p>Working on this situation can give students a certainty about other and another that many “advanced” learners lack.</p>
11.	<p>Take six light green rods and put them <u>together</u>, <u>end to end</u>.</p> <p>Stand them up and put them together <u>side by side</u>.</p> <p>Take them apart.</p>	<p>“Put the red ones together, end to end.”</p>
12.	<p>The light green rods are <u>short</u>.</p> <p>The blue ones are <u>long</u>.</p> <p>The red ones are <u>very short</u>.</p> <p>The black one is <u>longer than</u> the dark green one.</p> <p>Yours are <u>shorter</u> than mine.</p> <p>Give him <u>the longest</u> and me the <u>shortest</u>.</p>	<p>I almost immediately brought in <u>much, a little, and a lot</u>.</p> <p>Leo greatly enjoyed explaining that, “the orange rod is much, much, <i>much</i> longer than the white one!</p>

## Getting Out of the Students' Way

Leo and Liliana put their whole selves into making sense of situations like those above. One of the things I had to be careful about was to avoid overloading them, which I managed simply by getting out of the way... literally. I tried to be sensitive to the moments when they had just worked their way out of confusion, or had just managed to “put the pieces together” to form a comprehensible whole. At moments like these anyone may be tempted to say, “I understand; now I can go on to something else.” These were precisely the moments I would say to Leo and Liliana, “Now you need to practice it...” and walk out the door.

Pacing back and forth outside the open door of the classroom, I was “out of the picture,” but still able to see and hear everything that was going on. From my vantage point I observed the effects of using structures that had merely been understood. Leo and Liliana experimented, haltingly at first, then boldly, turning first to each other for help, and calling to me only in extreme cases. At their own pace they sorted things out until some inner key had been turned, locking the new information in place. Much was accomplished in moments, and all I had done was to step out the door. This useful practice is one I learned from my wife Susy, who, in the 1970's, decided to stop interfering with students' learning by going to the back of the room and sitting there, at the right moment, of course. Perhaps we should call this *teaching foreign languages the absent way*.

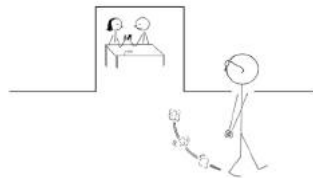
Having seen some of the fruits of occasional absenteeism on my part, I decided to go a step further and start out each new morning by greeting the students, placing the box of rods in the center of the table, and leaving the room. What would Leo and Liliana work on if they were given no instructions or hints about what to do? The first morning I tried this, there was a long silence followed by very subdued murmurings. I could just barely hear their voices. “A blue rod... a yellow rod...” They had chosen to name the rods! We started off each of the following mornings with the same exercise, and soon their hesitation vanished. In fact, I got the impression they were coming into the room with plans, so quickly and vigorously did they grab the rods and begin talking! It was enough to make a teacher feel he wasn't needed.

## A Free-Play Revelation

The “revelation” I had during these early morning moments of free play concerns the subject matter Leo and Liliana inevitably chose to work on. Each day I somehow assumed they would work on the things we had seen the day before. Each day they surprised me by choosing material we had worked on two or even three days earlier. Finally, I caught on, but I am still astonished as to how far off the mark I was in guessing what they wanted to practice.

Perhaps by letting Leo and Liliana choose for themselves, I was actually seeing how far the process of internalization was behind the introduction of new material. Sometimes they whizzed through what they wanted to practice; other days they ran into some difficulty and would call me into the room, and that would often be the starting point for the day’s “lesson.” But most often, a moment or two of input from me was enough, and I would see the light dawning.. . even though I frequently felt I was doing nothing very different from what I had done in my original introduction several days earlier.

Leo and Liliana who had been so timid grew more confident day by day and I suspect these 15 to 30 minutes of early morning free play had much to do with it.



## The Multiple Uses of the Charts

By the time we finished working on longer and shorter, four of the word charts had made their appearance and found a permanent place on one wall of our classroom:

<p>A rod -s -s blue brown  green red yellow black  take color not give 's  and as it to this 's  his two white here too  orange the is her them  these do another that  an the one are he me  put end him back there</p>	<p>which your my so get  have many has mine 've  our light I their how  name out dark you we  did what she same for  different in of am none  us got those both yet  with on if had be no  yes does let done they</p>
1	2
<p>At some longer -est  Given apart go right  shall together taken  who gave than long -er  but short by told 'm  much were all come n't  was can took tell -ing  left like very will 's  'r 'll ed ed 't ed 'll</p>	<p>Seven two four one  eight nine ten a -ty  forty three six -teen  twenty eleven twelve  five and thirteen .-ieth  thirty eigh fif nin -th  thousand times twelf  million hundred billion  second minus third plus</p>
3	12

# On an adjacent wall hung the eight Phonic Code Charts:

## The phonic code for American English

a	u	i	y	e	o	a	e	u	o	a	o	e	a	oo	o	l	a	o	u	ou					
au	o	o	ey	ea	a	u	u	e	a	ea	oo	ee	ai	ou	a	i	ai	oe	ew	hou					
i	a	a	ay	a	ho	i	ou	o	au	ah	ew	ea	ea	u	au	y	ay	ow	iew	ow					
	ou	u	ee	u	oh	io	oi	i	aw	aa	ou	y	e	o	oo	ie	ey	owe	eau	ough					
	oe	ia	ei	ay	ow	iou	oa	ea	awe	au	u	ie	ei	u	oo	ye	ee	ue	ue						
		ie	hi	ie	eau	ea	ai	ie	oa	ough	oe	i	ae	u	ho	igh	ea	ew	ew	oi					
		ae	ois	ei		ia	ei	y	augh	oo	eu	eo	aye	u	oo	eye	aigh	oh	hu	ay					
		is		ae		au	iu		oo	ou	ough	ay	ey	ue	oi	is	et	ough	eu	aw					
						ea	eau		ou	hou	wa	oe	ey	eu	owa	ais	ae	eau	ee						
						ah	ough		ho	ho	leu	ae		ue		ei	e	au	ee	oi					
						he	y		oa	oa	leu	is				aye	ee	ot		o					
p	t	s	s	s	m	n	f	v	d	th	th	y	l	w	k	r	b	h	g	sh	ch	ng	j	qu	x
pp	tt	ss	ss	z	mm	nn	ff	f	dd	the	the	i	ll	wh	kk	rr	bb	wh	gg	sch	tch	n	g	cqu	x
pe	te	se	se	ge	me	ne	fe	ve	de	the	h	j	le	u	ke	re	be	gu	ch	t	t	ngue	d		xe
ph	ed	's	's	t	mb	kn	ph	lve	ed		t	u	lle	o	ck	wr	bu	gh	s	c	c	nd	dge		cc
bp	d	z	c		lm	gn	gh	ph	'd		phth	'll	wh	c	cc	rh	pb	gue	ss	che	sch		ge		xc
	dte	zz	sc		gm	mn	lf	've	t			le		ch	cc	rps		ckgu	c	sch	sc	ge	gg		x
	pt	x	st		mn	ft	ffe		tt			ll		lk	rp	rt		ckgu	sch	sc	che	ge	dg		x
	ct	si	sw		'm	gne	pph							qu	rrh			ckgu	che	chs	che	dg	dj		x
	cht	thes	ps			in								que	rre	lo			ckgu	che	chs	che			x
	th	sth	sce		m	on								che	're				ckgu	che	chs	che			x
	phth	s'	sst			dne								cqu					ckgu	che	chs	che			x
	t		sth			nd								cch					ckgu	che	chs	che			x
	z	's	st			ln								co	r				ckgu	che	chs	che			x
	zz		st			n								kh	're				ckgu	che	chs	che			x

Each column displays all the ways to spell one sound. The top left column, for example, refers to the sound heard in:

splash

laugh (USA)

plaid

meringue

English spelling is seen for what it is: an enormous but finite problem. Gattegno devised fascinating games for working on pronunciation, fluency, reading and writing, at every level from beginner to highly advanced. The same Phonic Code is used in his Words in Color approach to teaching reading to native speakers.

This system was first developed for the Amharic Fidel, or alphabet of Ethiopia. Later, Gattegno produced 'Fidels', as users now call them, for a multitude of other languages.

These two sets of charts constituted our "ready reference" materials and were used frequently and in various ways throughout the time we were working with the rods. For example, when Leo and Liliana had finished exploring have and has together with the personal pronouns, they looked proud of having mastered the whole gamut of possibilities, but they also breathed a sigh of relief that there were no more pronouns left for them to worry about. This was my cue to pick up the pointer and move to the Word Charts.

I began by touching each of the words they had just been using: I, we, she, they, etc., and then tapping out sentences—short ones at first, then longer:

I have a red rod.

He has a blue one.

We have a hundred rods.

She has three hundred rods.

They have three hundred million rods.

He has thirty-three thousand light green rods.

You have a name.

Have you a name?

It has a name.

We have the same name.

He and she have the same name.

Some of the sentences above are similar to those the students had been saying earlier; others go a step further and describe situations that would be difficult to demonstrate, but easy to understand; many of the sentences combine what has just been learned (has/have, I, you, etc.) with previous discoveries (e.g., numerals, name, the same): there are also descriptions of almost impossible situations which beginners in a new language might find humorous. The seemingly endless ways to combine the words on the charts provide a great potential for creativity.

I next extended the range of possible sentences beyond the limits of the words on the charts. Touching words, objects and even people with the pointer, I tapped out sentences like:

Liliana has a red telephone.

We have two tables here.

This room has two doors and three windows.

All the while we were doing this, there were frequent interruptions:

A word is missing in Leo's "We have hundred rods." I raise five fingers and he says, "We have a hundred rods" with no need for me to point out the location of the missing word.

The second sound in the ey of they is ignored. I point to they at the bottom of chart 2 and “underline” the ey with the pointer. No improvement. I then point to name on the same chart. They say it correctly. I cover the last two letters of name and they say “nay”. I point to they and out comes the right pronunciation.

a
ai
ay
ey
ci
eigh
ea
aigh
et
ae
au
e
ee

We move to the Phonic Code charts. I touch ay in the column reproduced above, and get the sound they were just having trouble with. Using the pointer, I quickly make say, day, lay, way, pay and payday. I touch eigh in the same column and get some confusion. I touch eigh again, quickly followed by t. They say eight. I go back to eigh and get the correct vowel sound. I touch a and get the same. Next, I make same, name, take, lake, cake; then:

Take my cake.

Finally, I tap out:

Take a break.

They say this quickly and beautifully. I stand up and walk away, quipping, “Take a break? OK, thank you.” Leo frowns. Then, through his eyes I see an inner bulb light up. He jumps to his feet:



“Ah! a coffee break! No, no, a tea break! Good!” Exeunt students with teacher.



Ah!

## “Post -Paration”

Every afternoon, as soon as I had finished my last session with Leo and Liliana, I would wander off into the rich, green countryside surrounding the University of Kent, and replay in my mind the experiences I had just lived. As I looked into my actions, the students’ actions, and our reactions to one another, I began to see the entire drama in terms of failures and successes. By applying the yardstick—or better—the micrometer of awareness to these events, I could arrive at a far more informative picture of what really took place. Because the Silent Way materials and games are designed to give the teacher continuous feedback on the students’ progress, I always had a great deal of information at my disposal. Here is how I applied the criterion of awareness in my analysis:

Did our work with both and all succeed? Yes... I recall the moment they figured out that whenever there were only two items, both was obligatory. Their surprise and interest in the fact was evident, and after that point they continually made the distinction, no matter how cunningly I arranged the groups of rods.

Did our work on the sound er spark new awareness? They saw me tap out her, third, learn, word, etc. on the Fidel, and they eventually

made a vowel sound close to what I wanted, but I see no evidence they became aware that an r is always involved, nor that they must resist their inclinations to change the sound according to the written vowel (word first etc.). I need to try something else. Perhaps if I ...

At the end of this period of reflection I was normally left with a “plan” for the next day, even though I had not started out considering the next class at all.

Without a doubt, the best time to work on a particular lesson is when it’s over.



“Post-paration”

# Across the Spatial-Preposition Threshold

Somewhere between their work on the Present Continuous (e.g., “He is taking the white rods, two by two.”) and their first look at the spatial prepositions (on top of, in front of, between, etc.), Leo and Liliana passed a kind of threshold. They had started out as beginners, non-speakers of English, and now they had acquired enough of the nuts and bolts of the language—plus a great dexterity in using them—to be counted among those of us who claim to speak the tongue of William Shakespeare... or what’s left of it.

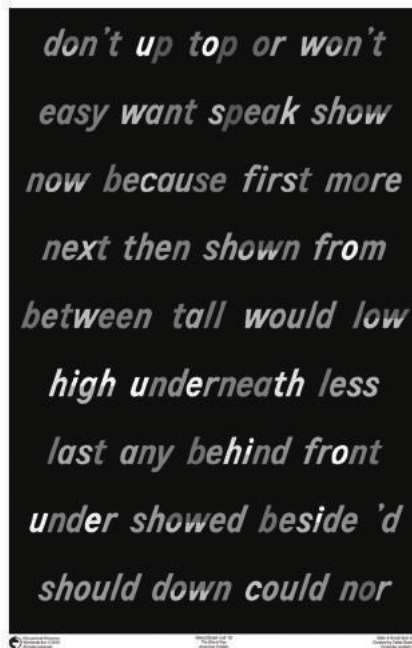


Chart 4

I've always found it easy and delightfully satisfactory to teach, and also to learn, the spatial prepositions by playing with the rods. This is partially because the rods are tangible and easy to put in different positions but mostly because the meaning of these prepositions can be grasped with no more than a glance at the arrangement of rods. On top of this, one can practice what one has just understood through commands as well as descriptions.

I arranged the rods in several ways and gave Leo and Liliana the words they needed. They began to make sentences like:

The red rod is in front of the black one.

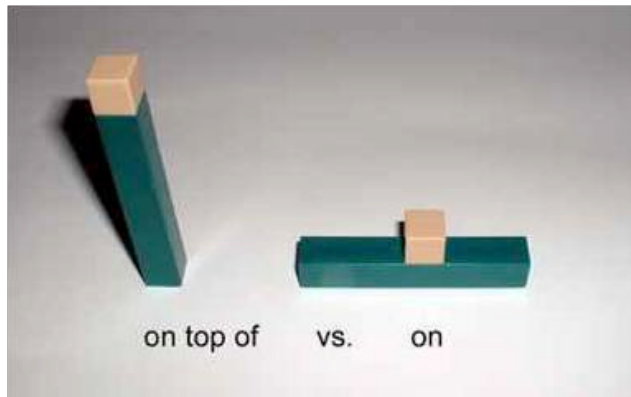
The light green ones are behind it.

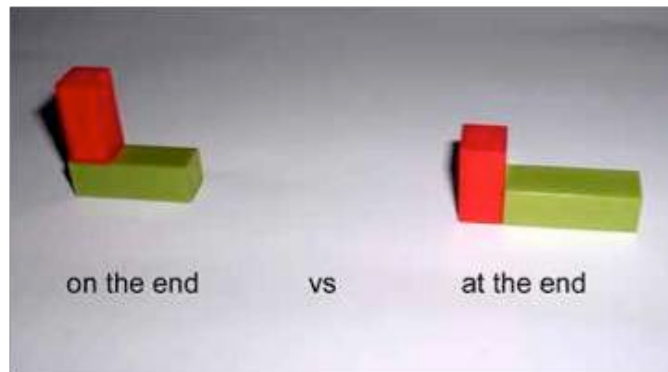
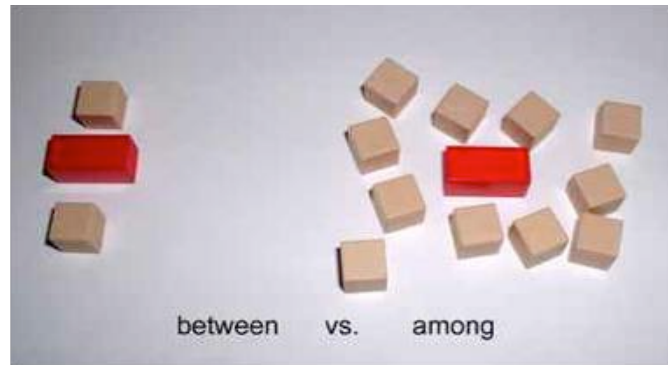
The black rod is between  
the light green ones and the red one.

In addition, they tried giving each other instructions:

...Liliana, take a blue rod, a brown one, and five white ones out of the bag. Put the blue one on the table. Now put the brown one on the blue one ... in the middle! Next, put a white one on top of the brown one. Now put the other white ones behind the blue one...

One can become very precise in this game and dramatically demonstrate subtle differences:





I was aware of the danger of becoming too precise. There is a definite and important difference between under and underneath, but my students at that moment, weren't ready for it. Are in back of and behind the same? For us, they were.

There are games involving rods and prepositions, which are interesting and very beneficial to middle-level and advanced foreign language students. Amazingly, I've discovered that even native speakers find a challenge playing the same games.

As I witnessed Leo and Liliana's enthusiastic manipulation of the prepositions, I felt they were ready to deal with the "luxury vocabulary" I had avoided giving them until now.

Perhaps "avoided" is the wrong word, since people don't say they avoid

giving steak to babies. The fact is that all persons confronted with the task of mastering a new and very wide field of experience, such as a foreign language, will make use of their powers of *stressing* and *ignoring* to allow themselves a chance to sort things out. I had co-operated with this natural process by placing before Leo and Liliana only one aspect of English at a time and giving them a chance to master each before going on to the next. This is quite a different fare from the menu offered by so many language schools around the world: a minestrone of grammar rules, pronunciation problems and X number of vocabulary items to be memorized. The result I have observed from such an approach is that students get exposed to everything and master nothing.

So, my attitude toward when to present house, jump, busy, etc. was to wait until my beginners had a firm grasp on the basics, that is, a feeling for how English grammar works and what the language sounds like. Silent Way teachers have found that once students are comfortable with the basics, they can absorb huge amounts of “luxury vocabulary” with little problem.

Actually, Leo and Liliana had been exposed to a lot of survival vocabulary, both on their own in the streets of Canterbury, and with another teacher in the late afternoons. I had co-operated by exposing them to the names of objects in the classroom: table, chair, telephone, door. etc.. All of this I am calling “exposure”, not learning, because we had dealt only superficially with the pronunciation of these words, not at all with their spellings, and had not set up any situations in which they could put the words to use and re-use in order to easily retain them. All of this I was now ready to do, because *they* were now ready.

## **When Rods Are Not Rods: First Steps in Acquiring Luxury Vocabulary**

A week and a half of the two-week course had gone by. Liliana sat before me, all alone. Something had apparently delayed Leo, and we decided to start without him.

I carefully cleared the table and placed a lone red rod halfway between Liliana and me. “What’s this?” I asked.

“A red rod,” she answered.

I looked surprised. “A red rod? No!”

She looked even more surprised and timidly offered, “a red stick?”

Now I was genuinely surprised. because I would not have guessed she knew stick. But I shook my head no, picked up the rod, and made it “walk” on the table. She stared... then said, “...a dog?”

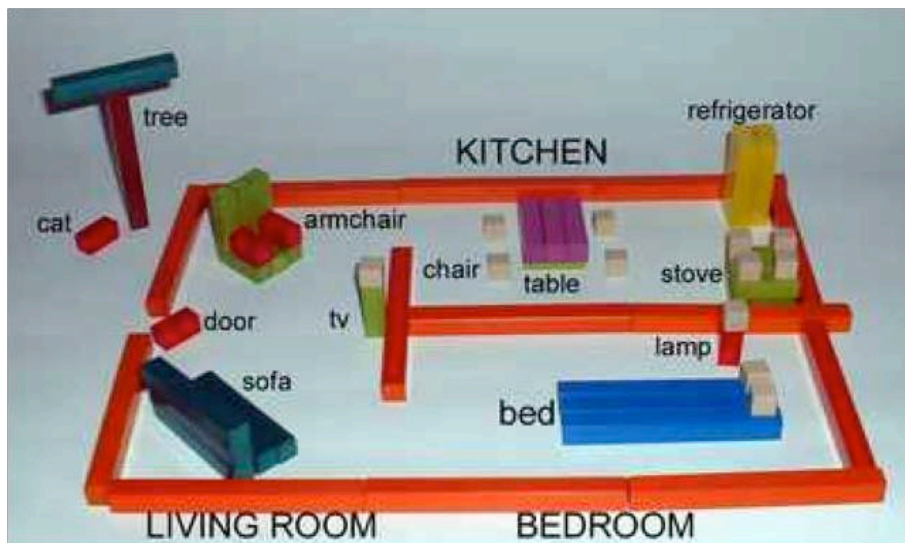
“Listen,” I replied, and held the rod to her ear as I let a quiet “meow” escape.

“A caht!” exclaimed Liliana. I pointed to at on Chart 3.

“A cat!”

Next I placed a green rod horizontally on a vertical brown one. She knew what it was meant to be and pointed to the trees outside the window. Since she didn’t know the English word, I said, “a tree.”

Soon there was a large house next to the tree, divided into rooms containing the furniture indicated below:



Liliana had known some of the words, but others I had supplied. Suddenly I pointed to the red rod: “What’s this?”

“A cat.”

“And this?”

“A bed.”

“This?”

“A tree.”

And round we went, as fast as we could go. At this point, Leo appeared, and Liliana became his teacher. When they had finished. I told them the story of the cat, which was accompanied by movement of the appropriate rods. Simultaneously, I used gestures and mime to indicate opening, an eye, laughing, looking at, etc. The story went like this:

This is a cat. It’s sleeping under a tree. Now it’s opening one eye. Now the other. Now the cat is walking. It’s walking to the house. The door is open... a little bit. The cat is opening the door a little more. Now it’s going into the house. It’s looking to the left and to the right...

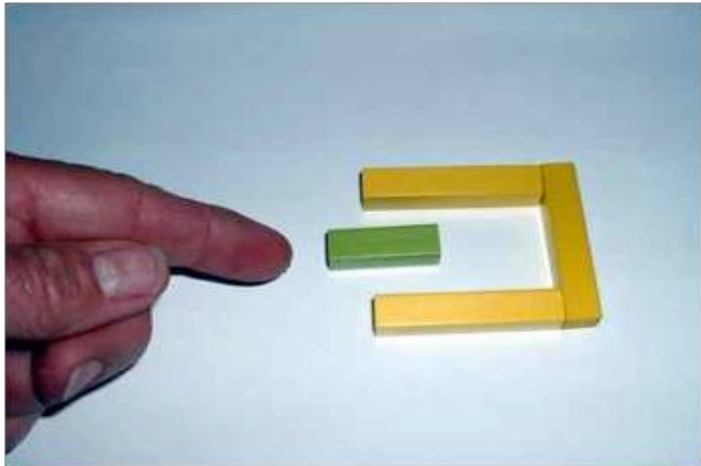
Suddenly I picked up a little white rod and placed it in the room.

“It is a mouse!” shouted Leo.

The mouse is behind the sofa. Now it is looking at the cat... and the cat is looking at the mouse! Now the cat is running across the room. The mouse is jumping on top of the sofa. The cat is jumping on top of the sofa, too. The mouse is jumping off the sofa and onto the armchair. The cat is right behind the mouse. Te mouse is jumping on top of the television, and the cat too!

I placed three rods next to the house and put a light green one in the enclosure.





“What’s that? I asked. “A dog,” chanted my students.

The dog is listening. It’s running to the house. It’s going into the house and it’s looking at the cat and the mouse. Now the cat is running out the door and the dog is running after it! The cat is climbing the tree, the dog is going back to its house, and the mouse is laughing!

This story is very similar to stories told long ago by Dr. Gattegno and still told by Silent Way teachers everywhere. It contains a great deal of the grammar Leo and Liliana had studied, which they quickly discovered when I asked them to retell it from the beginning.

My two students were now telling the story, but I was still manipulating the rods. This helped them recall a great many details they could easily have forgotten or skipped. Each movement I made seemed to trigger the expressions I had used earlier, including vocabulary items they had heard only that once. For example, when it came time for the dog to enter the story, one of them said, “The dog is running to the house.” But I left the green rod in place and cupped my ear. “Ahhh,’ they said, “ the dog is ... lis-listening!” And they carried on.

Throughout the retelling of the story, my students had to work on being precise. We were in no hurry. They knew that I already knew the

story, so this was not an exercise in communication. The challenge, the engaging and interesting challenge, was to succeed in telling this short story in a new language, and to do it well. They were working on pronunciation, intonation, word grouping, word order, grammar and new vocabulary all at the same time!

When Leo said, “the cat sleeping,” I just said, “the cat —” and paused. He immediately said, “the cat is sleeping.” Liliana then added, “the cat is sleeping under the trrree... trree...tree.” I waited until she had worked her way free of the trilled Italian *r*. Then I simply said, “again,” and she put the sentence together perfectly.

After my students had sweated through the process of telling me my own story, they looked not only satisfied, but triumphant. We then spent some time gathering up the many new words involved. I started them off by pointing to the red rod, getting “a cat” in chorus, and then handing Liliana a piece of chalk. “Write cat on the board.” She did, and then I pointed to the “tree”, and Leo wrote the word. After that, they knew what I was after, and took turns putting new words on the board. I intervened only a few times, usually with a gesture representing some action verb they had forgotten. Soon they were moving the rods about again, practically re-retelling the story to make sure they weren’t forgetting anything. When they had problems with spelling, I had them go down the appropriate column or columns of the Fidel, and stopped them when they got to the spelling they needed.

Sometime later we played with the “props” of the cat story, especially using them to practice spatial prepositions. For example. I took the “cat” and walked it around the “tree”. Leo and Liliana did all the talking:

The cat is walking around the tree.

It is walking around the house.

It is walking between the house and the tree.

It is running.

It is running behind the house.

(Here I added another “cat”)

They are running in front of the house, across the living room, etc.



## **Liliana's Story**

The next morning, Leo was late again and there was enough time before he arrived for me to tell Liliana a very short rod story about Mr. Brown (cleverly represented by a brown rod), who arrived home late one night, made a cup of coffee, smoked a cigarette, and went to bed.

Just as I finished, Leo arrived, and we all decided that Liliana would tell him the story. At least, that's what *I* understood was going to happen. But the first thing Liliana did was pick up a yellow rod and announce that it was "Mo" (Maureen), their late afternoon teacher. Then my ever-so-timid student, who hadn't known how to say "hello" two weeks earlier, launched into the delightful story of Hungry Mo And The Pizza Man. Leo, true to his nature, was writing down the entire story, weighing each word as if the future of nations depended on its accuracy

### **Hungry Mo and the Pizza Man**

This is Mo. It is 10:00 and Mo is driving her car to her house. She is very tired. She is going into her house and switching on the light. She is very hungry. She is picking up the telephone and she is calling the Pizza Man.

The Pizza Man is bringing a pizza to Mo's house. He is ringing the bell. Mo is opening the door and taking the pizza. She is giving two pounds to the Pizza Man.

Now she is going in the kitchen, sitting on the chair, and eating the pizza. She is making a cup of tea.

Mo is going into the living room and sitting on the sofa. She is drinking the tea. Now she is switching off the light, going into the bedroom, and sleeping.

The End

The path to the polished version of the story shown above, was actually fraught with a great variety of difficulties, most of which Leo and Liliana easily solved by themselves. The dynamics involved, including Leo's attempts at "corny" humor, even within such strict limitations, were partially captured by a tape recorder. Here are a few excerpts. Remember that Leo is attempting to write down Liliana's story as she is telling it.

Lili: ... She is going in the stove...

Leo: The stove?

Lili: No! ... the kitchen!? ... and she is sitting---

Leo: She is going in the kitchen and sitting to the table, no? (laughter) on the table...on the chair.

Lili: ...and eating...

Leo: The chair?

Lili: No! And eating the pizza.

Leo: (writing) and eating the pizza, yes?

Lili: She is going in the kitchen and she is making a cup of tea Mo is going in the li - liv--

Leo: In the live... eh, sorry, in the leving room.

Lili: leving room, yes. Leving...?...living!

Leo: Living! Living! Living!

Lili: Living room, um, and sitting, sitting... sitting on, on, on of? on sofa!

John: On \_\_\_\_\_ ...

Lili: On the sofa? On the sofa.

Leo: Moment. She is going in de—uh, sorry, Mo is going in de living room, and—

Lili: Sitting on the sofa. Yes. Mo is dr— dringing, uh, dringing...

John: (pulls sounds from her mouth.)

Lili: Drink... dringing .

Leo: Dringing ... uh-uh, drinking! Mo is drinking...?

Lili: Tea... (to John:) “tea?” or “the tea?”

John: Uh-huh.

Lili: The tea.

Leo: (solemnly) SHE DRINKING THE TEA!! Yes?

John: She \_\_\_\_\_...

Leo: Is!

Lili: She is drinking it. Now she is go, going in, in the bedroom and sleeping.

The tenth and last day of our Silent Way course is quite unlike the first. Leo and Liliana are now teaching themselves, giving themselves

as much practice as they need, and using me as a resource. They have learned a lot about English and a lot about themselves. They are well prepared to go on without a teacher.

I have changed, too. I have frequently caught myself making false assumptions and interfering with the students' learning because I was with my own goals and strategies rather than the realities in front of me. I have also learned from my successes and am now more courageous about stepping out of the students' way and playing a more humble role.

I do not know what befell Leo and Liliana after that summer at the university of Kent, but I would like to thank them here for their patience and perseverance and to wish them success as they go on to meet the challenge of the future, the unknown.

# **PART II**

## **Teaching Spanish to Beginners**

### **A Fourteen-hour Intensive**

#### **Course**

**by Susana Pint**

It's the Empire of the Rising Sun and we are on the sixth floor of a building alongside a river in a relatively quiet corner of the busy city of Osaka. John and I have come here to meet with a group of language teachers and share our teaching and learning experiences using the Silent Way

The seminar will consist of demonstration teaching followed by discussion. Some of the participants will take part in the demonstration as students of Spanish, my native language, and a few of them will continue studying Spanish with me after this seminar, during another fourteen hours.

The room has been arranged in two semi-circles: one for the observers in the back and one in front for the students, who are sitting around a long table.

#### **A Practical Preface**

We are all ready to start. I place the Spanish Fidel on the wall, although I don't immediately begin using it. My years of experience (especially

when working with teachers) have taught me to give the participants a short introduction to what I'm about to do. By this procedure I have often been able to avoid later misunderstandings...

“Why didn't you model the sounds?”

“How could we be sure we were producing  
the right sounds if we did not  
hear them from you?”

“Why did you make us say things  
that we couldn't understand?”

These are some of the common questions participants ask. Left unanswered, these concerns would distract them from the first part of the course. I suppose I used to assume that the reasons why I was not modeling would become evident as the class went on... but, I suppose, just as well, that I needed to account for the fact that I've been working with conditioned adults and not with free-minded children.

Therefore, I now invite the participants to consider a couple of points before I touch the first letter on the Fidel:

1. The way I will be working may seem strange to at least some of them, so various questions may come to their minds. All questions will be welcome, but for the sake of good organization, we will address them at the end of the session.
2. We will start by working on the sounds of the language. From the very beginning my role will be giving feedback, so I will not be modeling for the students. Why not? Because most of the sounds of the Spanish language already exist in the students' mother tongue (in this case there are at least two: Japanese and English.) Through certain techniques I will help them reorganize these familiar sounds in their minds as well as discover the ones new to them.
3. Although the students themselves will provide the models, I will not accept sounds or other elements of the language which do not agree



with the reality of the Spanish language.

4. During the first stage of the course, we will not concern ourselves with meanings. Along with the conquest of the sounds we will also be working on conquering other elements of Spanish, such as melody, rhythm, tone and accent. We will be working on the flow of words as they are put together. With these elements as our base, we will then begin to work on the meaning of our utterances through *communication*.

## **The First Sounds, The First Steps**

I start with the vowel sounds, which are arranged on the upper part of the Fidel, like so:

<b>a</b>	<b>u</b>	<b>i</b>	<b>e</b>	<b>o</b>
<b>ha</b>	<b>hu</b>	<b>hi</b>	<b>he</b>	<b>ho</b>
		<b>y</b>		

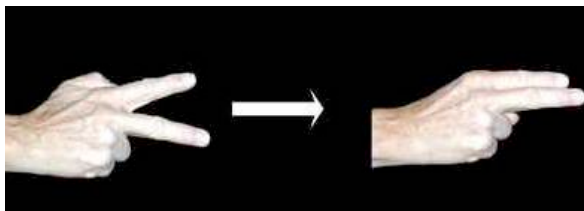
<b>l</b>	<b>m</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>d</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>ch</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>x</b>
----------	----------	----------	----------	----------	----------	----------	-----------	----------	----------	----------

<b>qu</b>	<b>v</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>g</b>	<b>ll</b>	<b>j</b>	<b>s</b>
<b>k</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>rr</b>	<b>gu</b>	<b>y</b>	<b>g</b>	<b>z</b>
<b>c</b>	<b>w</b>				<b>x</b>	<b>c</b>

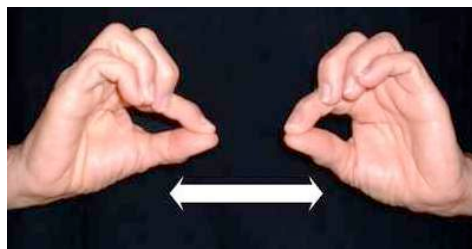
With the pointer I touch the letter a and wait to see what comes out of their mouths. After a moment of silence I hear some voices. It is a sign of their consent —which is precious to me— to play my game.

My ear, which has become very sharp, captures several different versions of that sound, for the group is made up of Japanese, Americans and Europeans. The a coming from the Japanese is as pure as the one in Castilian. With a gesture I invite one of them to repeat her a at the same time as I signal the others to listen to her. As she repeats it, the others lean in her direction, some of them cupping a hand to one ear. Then they try one a and another, while listening to our model and to themselves. They also turn to me, looking for my reactions to their different versions. For some of them, the sound has to be more open, for some longer, for others shorter... . but whatever the case is, my role will be to indicate specifically where they must make the changes which will bring them to produce the Spanish a. The following are some of the techniques I use to help them:

To shorten the sound:

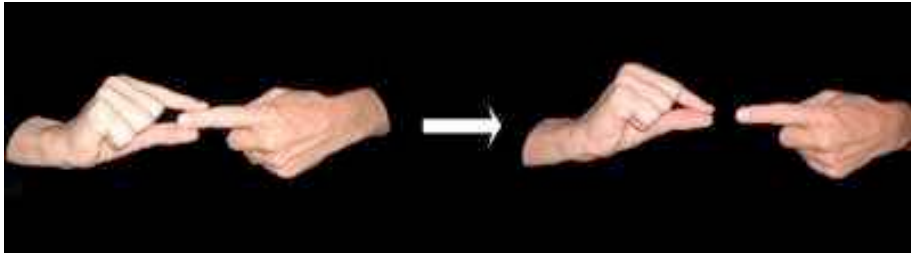


To make it longer:



To open it up:

To close it:



Hiding within the heart of this apparently drawn-out process is the opportunity they are getting to exercise certain human faculties in a special way: their attention, for one thing; their sensitivity, for another; and their intuition to let them know they are on the right track. They are being given the opportunity to “see” *inside themselves* the changes *they* have to make in order to produce the sound we are looking for. They are being given a chance to become aware of how their own vocal apparatus works and how they use it. They are being given a chance to exercise the disciplines which will keep them in touch with the reality of that sound so it will continue to be present. In addition, they are given the opportunity to participate directly in the class. We are, therefore, laying the ground here for them to become independent learners. Besides, why do I have to model if the sound is already among them?

By working this way I’m also giving myself the opportunity to “turn on” my own human faculties: my sensitivity, affectivity, intuition,

intelligence... which will help me to learn something about their differences. I'm giving myself the opportunity to find out something about the way they —each of them— use their inner time, for not everybody sees the same thing at the same time. I will also be able to get an idea of what needs to be done so their energy can be channeled in one direction, so they will use their differences to benefit one another and ultimately to work as one group.

I know, however, that this will not be a fast or an easy job. For it's true that as adults, we carry a great deal of fear—fear intimately related to our conditioning. This, together with the fact that we human beings learn through trial and error, will demand the use of all I have learned up until now about patience and humility as well as keeping away from expectations.

Let's see if what I'm talking about becomes evident as we continue working.

We finally get our a sound clear and continue with the u. Again, I hear different versions and we work patiently and carefully until everybody has the real Spanish sound. No, I don't expect perfection. Instead, I respect their work which has brought them to the best approximations they can muster.

When the top line of the five vowel sounds is conquered, I give them some practice exercises. These will consist of making different combinations with the five sounds. For example:

a+e

o+ i

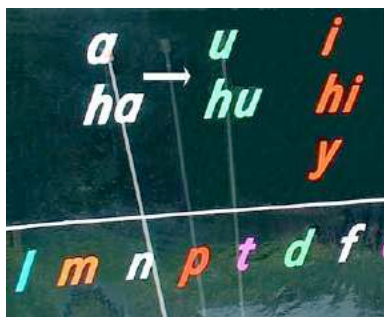
u+a

i +e

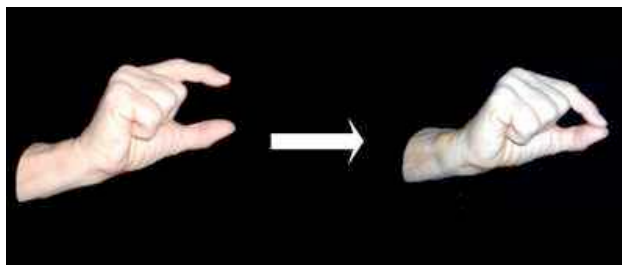
etc.

They give these combinations back to me, separating the two sounds (o i instead of oi, for example) and I accept it for the moment. I know, however, that these exercises are actually the first steps for working on words. Therefore, I direct them to join the two sounds through several different techniques. For example:

1. I signal them to pay attention and I tap, let's say, a+u (two letters next to each other on the Fidel, to make things easier for them). I tap out the sounds without removing the pointer from the chart, emphasizing the a by giving it a stronger tap.



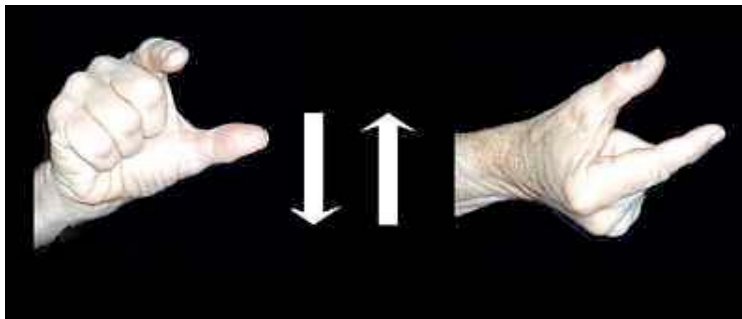
2. A hand gesture (after tapping the two letters):



3. My last resort: I hum the two sounds.

As a practice exercise we join two-sound combinations at *different speeds*. Then, very unexpectedly, I invite one of them to follow the pointer all alone. “Very unexpectedly” as well, I hand the pointer to someone and sit in his chair. He gives the others some similar exercises.

I feel the arrival of a relaxed atmosphere, so I take the pointer back and continue by giving them some exercises on *reversing* the two sounds. My technique to make this visible to them consists of twisting my hand (as shown below) after tapping out the two sounds:



For some of them the meaning of the gesture is clear, but not for all. So, I go back to the first sound. I tap it out and “put” it on my index finger. Then I tap out the second sound, “put” it on my thumb and twist my hand again.

This technique will help us later when a word or a letter has been misplaced, when the word order in a sentence has been changed, etc.

## Other Spellings for the Vowel Sounds

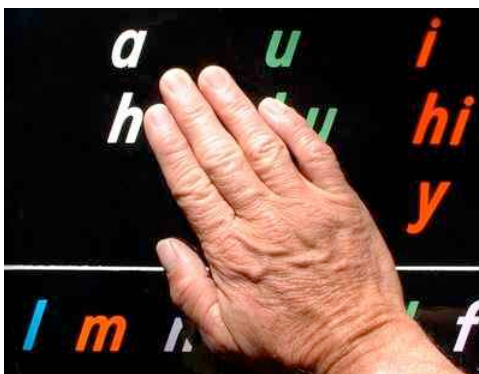
The seemingly useless h in the second line of the Fidel is going to give us a new problem to solve.

<b>a</b>	<b>u</b>	<b>i</b>	<b>e</b>	<b>o</b>
<b>ha</b>	<b>hu</b>	<b>hi</b>	<b>he</b>	<b>ho</b>
		<b>y</b>		

It would certainly be faster if I just told them that we don't pronounce the h in Spanish. But the path we are following is one where they will also be put in touch with the arbitrariness of the language. Now we find

this one, later others will come. This, then, will be a good opportunity for them to start developing the disciplines that will help them *to be with what is*. And it will not be my loud and disturbing voice which will remind them that a particular letter has no sound, or, later on, that something else is not as it looks.

I make my first move to help them discover the soundless h by tapping out the a column from top to bottom in a straight line. I pay attention to their voices and to the expressions on their faces. I notice uncertainty in a few of them. For some, it's the first time they have seen the Fidel and how it is used. They find now that the colors are related to the sounds. So, I show them the a and then go down to the ha. Here, some of them say the sound using the English h. I gesture that they should look *carefully* and I go back to ha. With one hand I isolate the h:



and then I isolate the a in an attempt to show them that the two letters are the same color. Then, very quickly, I tap out the two letters in a straight line, from left to right. For some of them the idea is now clear and I hear their voices saying the right sound. I then tap out another spelling containing the h and gesture to them to say something. This time I hear more voices, but somewhere I still hear the English h. My next strategy: I “take the h and throw it away.” This time I see sparkling eyes that say, “I’ve got it!”

I now go to the i sound, which has three spellings on the Fidel. I point to the column—again from top to bottom—and hear practically the whole

group saying the correct Spanish sound. Then, in a quick movement, I point to the i alone and I hear the sound coming from the group. Equally fast, I touch hi and hear some loud voices saying the sound... as well as some timid ones (although the English h has disappeared). I continue by inviting one of them who I know has gotten it to work alone. I tap out different sounds for him and, as he speaks, I gesture to the others to listen to him. Since I know that the English h is still floating in the air, I pay special attention to the faces of the timid ones when I tap out sounds accompanied by the Spanish h. They are so attentive to what this student is saying that finally that they even join him.

I now give one of the timid ones a chance to work alone. She accepts my invitation (otherwise I would not have forced her) and I tap out some sound combinations, including ones with the h, of course. She speaks very softly at the beginning, but little by little her voice gains confidence. I then do a similar exercise with somebody else.

## **Words and Sentences with the Vowel Sounds**

They are now ready to jump to another stage and I start by giving them a visual exercise consisting of combinations of three or more vowel sounds (aou, ieo, haie, etc.) We “play” by reading them at different speeds and by reversing them.

I then continue by giving them real words (although they don’t know they mean) like: ay, hey, hoy. Then I go to the blackboard and write:

i — !

I go back to the Fidel and tap out a+y again and then, with the pointer, I “transport” the word to the line on the blackboard.

For most of them the idea is clear. They say “ay” and, very timidly, some of them give it a soft emphasis. I point again at the line and look at them with an exclamatory expression. This time I hear a beautiful “iay!” coming from most of them. Someone even bends down, touches one of his feet and repeats his “iay!” with an expression of pain. I approve his



contribution by miming that somebody has stepped on one of my feet and exclaim, “¡ay, ay, ay!” Their laughter tells me they don’t mind my silly joke.

I continue by tapping out he + y touching the line. There is an almost general ihey!... . still with some timidity from the Japanese. Yes, it will take them some time to get adjusted to a very expressive language. But they will be able to notice this particularity in the language they are learning and *they* will decide how to handle it. Therefore I don’t encourage them to try to be expressive. I give them a chance to take their time.

Next, I give them some more exclamatory combinations. For example, by tapping the line (i- - - !) three or more times, so they could say, “ay, ay, ay!” or “¡huy, huy, huy!” etc.

I continue by going to the blackboard to write:

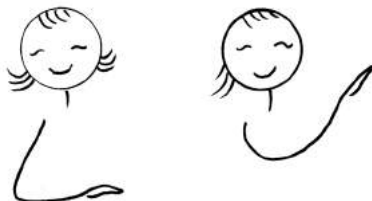
¿ — ?

Then I go to the Fidel and tap out ha + y and “transport” the word to the new line. No, I don’t expect them to produce an expressive ¿hay? or an ¿hay? whose length fits the Spanish one, and I’m right: again, I can feel a mist of uncertainty floating in the air. And even if the mist is now less dense than previously, I know it’s there. So I proceed as carefully as possible.

A soft hay? comes out of their mouths, so I touch the line again and turn around to demonstrate how the face, eyes, arms, hands and the entire body can be used to give emphasis to the question.



This time I hear a more expressive ¿hay? which rises in intonation, but the value of the two sounds is not correct. So, I touch the line again and make this gesture, inviting them to follow my hand:



With this technique they can “see” the length of both sounds as well as the intonation.

We do more exercises with some other words and when I feel that the mist of uncertainty has vanished, we continue by working with sentences. I then write:

¿ \_ \_ ?

I go to the Fidel and make up the words hay and hoy and “transport” them to the lines, one by one. The first version I hear coming from them is the two words separated, so I do the “joining technique” plus the gesture I had used previously to show the intonation.

We move on with three words:

¿ — — ?

(¿y hay hoy?)

And, Later, combine the two forms (interrogative and exclamatory):

¡ — ¡    ¿ — — ?

(¡hey! ¿hay hoy?)

For the next step we will be inserting some consonants:

¿ — — ?

(¿hay hoy ?)

— , — —

(no, no hay)

¡ — !    ¿ — — ?

(¡hey! ¿y hoy?)



(sí, sí, hay)

To join the words in these longer strings, I “tap out” the sentences on the table, using the pointer or my knuckles. I also hum the melody.

Besides helping them acquire a *feeling for the flow* of sentences, these exercises are already giving them a hint about the negative and positive forms as well.

## The Consonants

I then proceed to introduce them to the consonants and I start by tapping out l + a. The l coming from the English speakers is too heavy and drawn out, so I tap out the word la once more, touching the l several times to let them know that they have to watch out for that sound. They say it once more and, with one of my fingers, I point at the tip of my tongue and push it to the part of my palate it touches when the sound is produced in Spanish.

Then, with my two hands I “pull” air from the sides of my mouth, like this:



and I tap out the word again. They try one version and another, looking for the difference. Observing their concentration, I see that they are

*with* the problem. I listen to their different versions and with gestures showing “right”, “wrong” or “so-so”, I encourage them to continue searching.

When I feel they have gotten close to the Spanish 1, I tap out the word again and have them reverse it. By reversing it, the sound becomes more evident. As I do all this, I move very slowly, in a very relaxed manner, like the sound itself.

Most of them now have the sound, so I have them say the two words (la and al), lengthening the l so they can *see* and *feel* it.

It’s fascinating to notice that at the same time I’m working with the English speakers on one problem, the Japanese are working on solving their own: Although al gives them no problems la does. Listening to their la I find other sounds mixed in with it.

Seeing them working on these problems so seriously and patiently, makes me realize one of Dr. Gattegno’s principles of the Silent Way: the students once more becoming investigators, careful observers of their own work, just as when they were babies. So, I don’t waste time hoping they will achieve perfection. The discovery of the reality of the sound is already enough. Practice meeting the sound in other situations will give them more opportunities to be in touch with it.

One exercise, for example, consists of giving them a visual dictation in which this sound is integrated with the previous ones. I start with short words, then longer, and finally use short phrases:

el  
al  
ala  
ola  
hilo  
el ala  
el hilo  
la ola y el ala

I continue by inserting the m for example:

mal

miel

lima

lama

mu1a

el álamo

el hilo

la lima y el álamo

el hilo, la lama, la mula y el álamo

I continue the exercise by inserting other sounds (one by one) always using words which contain the previous sounds. I start with sounds which will present no great difficulties to this particular group of students (like s, n, c-k-qu), leaving to the end those which require a little more attention, such as ll, y, j, rr. In fact, to help them find sounds like the j, for example, all I do is to point at my throat and make a gesture implying strength. And, as for the rr, I point to the tip of my tongue, “push it” to the place on the palate where it rests when the sound is produced, and then make my gesture for strength.

As we go on inserting new sounds, as I mentioned before, I may begin by using nonsense sound combinations which lead us to words... which, in turn, bring us to short and then longer sentences. (My longest sentences contain no more than ten or twelve words.)

## **Meanings Through Communication**

Working on the conquest of the sounds has given them a chance to encounter other important elements of the language I had promised them they would meet. All of this, in fact, means that they have learned *how to read Spanish* almost at the level and with the ease of a native speaker. This important stage has taken place in a little over an hour

and it has obviously not been an hour of suffering, for they seem very relaxed. They have struggled, yes, and they have had problems to solve but I was *with* them at those moments and they have been *with* the challenges presented. Hence their success. I directed them to the road that made things easier for them but I did not instruct them on what to do or how to do it, which has given them a chance to work at a very personal level, to find the right solutions according to their own personalities.

Having arrived at this point shows that they have also learned how to handle their uncertainties, their frustrations, their fears.

The next stage they will now face is one I have found my students enjoy enormously. However, being a new stage, there will be *uncertainty*, so I proceed with caution.

I start by putting up the word charts, numbers 1 and 2:

<p>una regleta s es is  a verde amarilla le do  roja negra tome si da  no azul de lo ponga  se la tengo y Vd aquí  tiene me ahí mi an  alli tambien esta que  dentro cada entre solo  ten el pon toma tu n</p>	<p>mas color pequeña vez  corta mucha suya e  grande nos son otra u  nuestra cuantas poco  os un tan muy tal r  quien yo cual llamo  llama como su fuera o  nunca ya pues por to  ningun algun nada as</p>
1	2

However, I don't use the charts immediately because they are now more familiar with the Fidel, so that is what I use to give them the special sentence which will introduce this new stage.

I tap out yo me llamo and they read it. Although they have read so many sentences before, they appear a little timid and I gesture to them to say the sentence. As they say it I notice they have changed the value of some of the sounds, so I touch the related letters (rather than repeat the entire sentence) and have them say the sentence once more, gesturing that they should add life to it. I then show them the very same sentence on the word charts, which produces a very special expression on their faces. The same words, seen on the charts, seem to have acquired some mysterious difference! After a moment of silence they read the sentence without any encouragement on my part, and I go to one of them. I take his hand and position his fingers so he is pointing at himself. With a gesture, I ask the group to *keep silence* and with another gesture I ask our involuntary volunteer to *pay attention*. I go back to the charts, reconstruct the sentence for him, plus his name, and indicate he should *speak*. He says, "Yo me llamo Paco," with quite a good accent and pronunciation, although with the same mystified expression on his face.

I then go to the student next to him, gesture she should pay attention and tap out her name on the Fidel. I have maybe risked asking too much of her by not tapping out the whole sentence... but I will see what happens. I gesture "say something" and very timidly she says, "Yo... me llamo Chisuko." Yes, she has easily recalled the words and she has understood the game as well, so I continue with the next student. Everyone is attentive to what that person says and some of them murmur the words along with her. When I get to the last person I see a spark that says, "I've got it!" in the eyes of most of them. I then make them point at me at the same time as I point at myself. I tap out the sentence "Tú te llamas Susana." As they say it, still pointing at me, there is no doubt all of them have understood: the mist of uncertainty has lifted, leaving behind smiles of relief. I hear some soft voices saying, "Tú te llamas Susana. . . Yo me llamo X."

Next, I go to Paco and turn his head towards me while indicating that he should look at me. I make him point at himself and gesture for him



to *say something*. He says, “Yo me llamo Paco.” Still in front of him, I point at myself, looking at him, and he says, “Tú te llamas Susana.” With another gesture I invite him to repeat his statement, but this time I point at him and immediately at myself. He says, “Yo me llamo Paco. Tú te llamas Susana.” I turn his head towards Chisuko and turn her head towards him... and wait. He points at himself and tells her, “Yo me llamo Paco...” After a moment of silence, he points at her and tells her, “Tú te llamas Chisuko,” and I move away from them.

Chisuko continues the game by turning towards the person next to her, and so on. As the minutes go by, they seem ever more sure of themselves.

To add something else, I go to the blackboard and point at one of the lines bracketed by question marks (¿\_\_\_\_?). Then I gesture to one of them to say something to the next person. After an instant of doubt, she asks her, “¿Tú te llamas María?” María looks at her, nodding. I call her attention and show her the word *si* on chart 1 and motion that she should follow this with other words. Very slowly, yet sure of what she is saying, María tells Chisuko, “Si, yo me llamo María”.

I go back to my seat, which is behind them, and I watch them ask each other questions. There hasn't been any need for me to introduce them to the negative form. I give them a chance to use their common sense:



To go further into this new field of study, I turn Paco's head towards Chisuko and indicate that they should look at each other. I take Paco's hand and make him point at me. I then go to the charts and construct

for him the sentence ella se llama Susana. He tells Chisuko, “Ella se llama Susana,” while he points at me. I then make him look at me while pointing at Maria. In a very playful and rhythmical manner, he tells me:



To introduce them to the masculine pronoun él, all I have to do is point at one of the male participants and show the word él on chart 1.

From my seat I watch them work out their own practice exercises. They have a good amount of material and have clearly decided not to waste their time. And everybody gets into the act.

Since I am following them very closely, I let my intuition tell me *when* I can make a new move. But frequently, they make it for me, as if their words were mine. One example of this occurs while Paco is talking with Chisuko: “Yo me llamo Paco.” During this pause he points at Chisuko and then tries to continue his statement: “... ¿tú...” What he is looking for becomes clear to me. So, I stand up, point at the words y and tú on the charts and then go to the blackboard and point at the line with question marks. Very casually, he tells her once more: “Yo me llamo Paco. ¿Y tú?” and continues questioning her while pointing at other students.

When I feel they are ready for something new, I show them the question ¿Cómo te llamas? (What’s your name?) on the charts and then gesture that they should say this to the person beside them. What will follow this will be ¿Cómo se llama ella/él? and I leave the plurals for later on.

Experiencing this exercise in which they have a chance to talk to each other is certainly another step in the direction of overcoming the barrier of *fear of the unknown*.

As I step out of their way, letting them work out their own exercises, they are given an opportunity to put their creativity to work and to use their own criteria, their own common sense to judge their work. Their differences seem to benefit the entire group. Therefore, there are no students who fall behind. Their attention to what is happening is *right there*, with their work. What they are doing is completely voluntary... and, to all appearances, quite enjoyable as well.

The spirit of being *one* group is there.

## **The Use of the Rods: A Completely Different Challenge**

By the time we get to this stage, they are familiar with me, with my personality. They are also familiar with the material and with the techniques. We all know something about each other. The next step in the confrontation of the unknown will not, then, be as rough. I will try, however, to continue being careful not to fall into the trap of *expectations*.

To introduce them to this stage I again use the Fidel, rather than the word charts, for two reasons: 1) not all of the colors that correspond to the rods are included on the charts; 2) they are more familiar with the Fidel than they are with the charts.

I now go to the Fidel and tap out the words una regleta (a rod). We work a little bit on the correct pronunciation and the melody. We also do some exercises on the speed, and as we do this I pay special attention to the Japanese because of their new awareness about the r and the l sounds. So, when their own language interferes, I assist them by pointing (and nothing more) at the two related letters on the Fidel.

Next, I add a new word —blanca— and then write on the blackboard:



Since they are already familiar with this technique, as soon as I touch the lines I hear several voices saying, “una regleta blanca.” I make the *joining* gesture followed by signs for *relaxation* and *rhythm*. Without any invitation from me to do it, they repeat the phrase in a very natural manner.

But, “Why lines and not words?” some readers may be asking themselves. Well, for the same reason as for the colors on the charts: to eliminate distracters. Besides, the lines act as triggers, inviting the watchers to be active, rather than passive, to generate the words in the right order and keep them in their mind’s eye. Of course, as we continue, I will *not* be expecting them to remember what each little line represents. (Otherwise, the exercise would fall into the category of memorization.) The work they are doing now prepares them for the moment when I will actually present them with the rods.

After blanca I show them negra. This time, as I tap out the word I draw a new line under the one representing blanca:



I continue with other colors whose names are relatively easy to pronounce, like rosa, amarilla and roja. As we meet new colors, which grammatically represent the use of the adjectives, I add new lines under the previous ones. I leave the two-word colors, verde claro and verde oscuro, for the end:



After doing some “reading” (all they see are lines, of course) I go to chart 1 and give them a visual dictation restricted to the colors which are on the chart. I then introduce them to the written form of the missing colors by going back to the lines. After tapping out a phrase, I again point to the line representing the missing color and, as they say it, I offer the chalk to the group, miming write it and pointing to the blackboard. One volunteer comes and writes the color and other volunteers write the rest.

We now have all the colors in a written form. So I give them a visual dictation, this time using both the chart and the words written on the blackboard (una regleta blanca, una regleta azul, una regleta verde

claro, etc.)

In the process, besides working on the melody, rhythm, etc., I make them notice the elision in the cases of una regleta amarilla and una regleta azul, where one a loses its value. To help them *see* this, rather than explaining it, I again tap out una regleta amarilla. Next, I point at the final a in the word regleta with one hand, while at the same time pointing at the beginning a in amarilla with the other. Then I lift the two fingers with which I was pointing and join them, like so:

STEP 1:

STEP 2:



It is, in fact, necessary to do this only once. Afterwards, when they forget to elide, I very quickly point to one of the a's and use the simpler joining gesture they are already familiar with .

Later, a wink will be enough for them to instantly visualize the sentence and correct the matter, whether it's in cases like this one or others, as we will see later on.

As the next step, I take the box of rods and open it in the middle of the table behind which I am standing, facing toward them. I take a white rod, show it to them and wait. Since the first phrase I had shown them was una regleta blanca, for some of them it's easy to guess that what I'm holding up is exactly. We continue this way with the rest of the rods. Just to make things easier for them, I choose colors which may be similar in their own language (in this case, negra or marrón for the English speakers). What is interesting, though, is that they seem to notice this similarity only at the moment they *see* the rods.

We now do some exercises. For example, I take one rod at a time and show it to them:



In another group exercise, I point at the rods I have left scattered about the table:



An exercise for individuals is to stand the ten rods like a staircase and gesture to one student to name all of them:



They are now ready for another stage in communication: I put the open box in front of Chisuko. Now I gesture to Paco —who is at her side— to pay attention. I go to the charts and tap out toma una regleta roja for him. I go back to the two of them, take the box and move it as if offering it to Chisuko. I look at Paco, gesturing to him to say something to her. He tells her, “Toma una regleta amarilla.” Although I don’t know whether he really understands what he’s telling her, I am quite happy that he’s not repeating the color I suggested. (In fact, I find this happens in most of my classes, which tells me something about the students’ individuality.)

Chisuko hesitates, so I go to her side. I take her hand and put her fingers in position for going to take something and signal Paco to speak to her again. I see a sparkle in his eyes and, this time, he tells her in a happy and demanding tone, “¡Toma una regleta amarilla!” She takes a yellow rod, but her expression shows that she’s not sure of what’s going on. I feel the impulse to have Paco ask her to take another rod,



but something else makes me wait to see whether things will clear up as we continue. I move the box to the person at her side and gesture to her to say something to him. Although still unsure, she hesitatingly says to the student, “Toma una regleta roja.” He takes it and then passes the box to the next person. They continue the game this way with no help necessary from me, so I go back to my seat.

It’s very interesting to notice that when the uncertainty starts disappearing, a very playful attitude develops. They also tend to use colors they have had difficulty with:

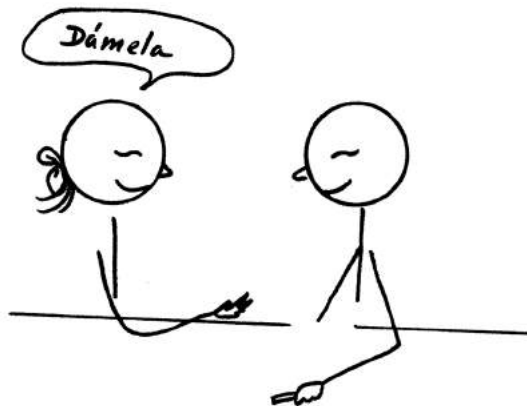


At the end of the session, some of them indicated that they were not sure whether toma meant take, show or something else. “It didn’t

bother me, though,” one of them said. “I knew I would eventually find out what it really meant.”

On other occasions, I have experimented with introducing the plural of the colors as the next stage. I have found, however, that because of some irregularities that are found there, we have had to stop to figure out something new instead of continuing work on things that made more sense at that level. Therefore, I will try to give this group something that will follow a more rewarding sequence.

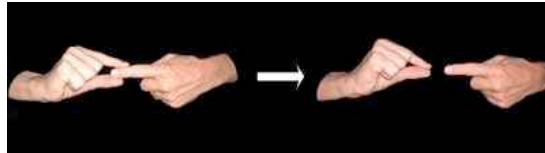
I go back to them; I take the box of rods and I put a yellow rod on top of the others. I point at it and gesture to them to ask me to take it. In one voice, they tell me, “¡Toma una regleta amarilla!” We continue in this way with some other rods. I then put all the rods back in the box and again remove just one, putting it on top of the others, just as before. This time, after they have asked me to take it, I keep it in my hand. I show it to them, telling them, “¡Atención!” and gesturing they should pay attention. I go to chart 1 and tap out da/me/la. Then I do the joining technique and go to one of them. I take her hand and put it in a position of asking for something. With no preamble whatsoever, she tells me, “damela.” I again do the joining technique and hum the word, emphasizing the first syllable. She says, “dámela” and I give it to her. I immediately gesture to someone else (not necessarily the student next to her) to ask her to give it to her. I know my presence is unnecessary, so I go sit in my chair and watch them integrate the previous material with the new.



They play this way for a while and I watch for that special moment that tells me, "Pay attention... they are getting bored!" Now I introduce them to the plural: I take two white rods and put them on the table. I wait to see whether somebody already knows the word dos (two) but there is silence. They look at the rods and at me as if saying, "Now... what's that?" I put up chart 5, which contains the numbers and point to the word dos. I go back to our two white rods, point at them and gesture that they should say something. They look at me doubtfully and, very

timidly, some of them say, “dos regleta... blanca... ?” and I make a sign that they should repeat their statement. As they are speaking, I use the finger technique.

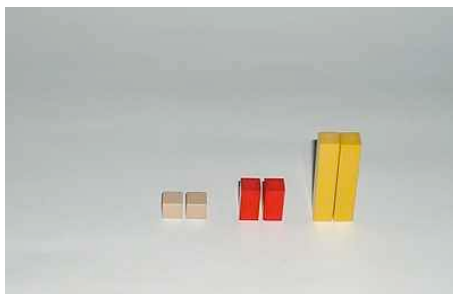
I “put” the word dos on one finger, regleta on the next one and blanca on the following one. I have them say the sentence once more but this time we go word by word. Dos is fine, so we go to the next one (regleta). Here, as I point at the finger, I make a lengthening gesture:



“regletas!” almost all of them shout, and I immediately show they should continue on with the next finger (blancas). I don’t have to repeat the lengthening gesture. “¡Blancas!” almost all of them say at once. I go back to the first finger but I don’t have them say the phrase word by word. As I touch the first finger I make a circular motion suggesting continue. I hear a beautiful idos regletas blancas! I then put two red rods on the table. No need to gesture or do anything: “¡Dos regletas rojas!” they say. We continue with more sets of two rods:



Since, as I mentioned before, there are some irregularities in the plurals of the colors, we first work on the regular ones. Then, to make the irregularities become *visible*, I leave the first rods we worked on (the regular colors) right where they are, but I stand them up:



Then I point at my head with a gesture saying, “Here is something crazy.” (These irregularities, in fact, vary from country to country and from place to place.) I take two brown rods, point at them and stand them away from the other rods to form a new group:



I gesture to them to say something. On other occasions I have had students who somehow have guessed correctly, so I will see what happens now. After a moment of silence, a very soft voice says, “dos regleta...s marrón...s” I shake my head no and make a scissors like motion with my fingers. Now some other voices say, dos regleta marrón. I look at one who has said that and I make a motion implying that it’s not so bad. I show her the three fingers we had used before and use the lengthening gesture on the second finger and the scissors on the third

one. They all say at once, “¡Dos regletas marrón!” We continue on with dos regletas verde oscuro and dos regletas verde claro (two dark green ones and two light green ones). Since colors like rosa can be said in either form (rosa or rosas) I put two pink ones in each group. The case is the same for the orange ones.

Azul is another interesting color, since one more letter has to be added before the s. When I show them two of these rods, they very cleverly wait to see which group I will put them in but I place them between the two groups. Then I point at the group where the s must be added and wave a hand to imply something like in there. One or two say, “dos regletas azuls,” but most of them keep quiet. I again show them the three fingers we had used before and point at the last finger, making the lengthening gesture and exaggerating it a little. I’m not surprised to hear some voices saying, “azules”, because that has happened so many times in the past. What I do find surprising, though, is their guessing the exact letter that precedes the s. I should think that a instead of e would seem the more logical choice.

I next present them with other numbers up to five for which I use chart 5 and the rods. An example:





Before leaving them alone to practice, I give them a bit more to work on. First, I put a yellow rod next to a red one, with a gap between them. I touch the yellow one first, then a point between the two rods and then the red one. They say, “una regleta amarilla,” then they stop and look at me... and there is silence. They have already been introduced to the conjunction they need, so I wait for them to recall it, but seconds go by and nothing happens. “Stop expecting!” something tells me. So I go to the charts and point at the word *y* (and). Their eyes shine and a smile appears: “Una regleta amarilla...y.... una regleta roja,” they say. I do my it’s okay... but... gesture and I point at the red rod. Then I go to chart 1, “take” the word regleta and “throw it away.” They look at the rods again and, very sure of themselves, they say, “Una regleta amarilla y . . . una roja.” I immediately take two more rods with different colors; then two more, and we play for a little while, going at different speeds. Next, I add one more rod (una regleta blanca, una roja y una verde oscuro) and then another, until we reach five.

We then move to the plural: I put two black ones almost next to a pink one. Since the situation has now changed a little, they hesitate at first, but then succeed: “Una regleta rosa y . . . dos... rrr (ino!) . . . idos negras!” And we continue on this way, adding more rods.

When I have given them enough practice, I take two white rods and four blue ones and put them in the box, on top of the others. I gesture for them to ask me to take them. “Toma dos regletas blancas y cuatro azules,” they say. I take them and offer them to the group. I pay attention to the first voice asking me for them. He tells me “dámela” and I wave the rods for him to notice that I have more than one. Not just he, but everybody says, “¡dámelas!” I give them to one of them and withdraw, leaving them on their own.

Do they look at me to find out what they are supposed to do next? No, they don't. And I am impressed not so much by the amount of material they are about to put together, but by how independent of me they have become. From my chair I hear them talking to each other:

-Toma una regleta negra y dos azules.

(pause) Dámelas.

-Toma una verde claro, una verde oscuro, tres marrón y cuatro azules. (pause)

Dámelas.

Am I hearing only perfect Spanish? Certainly not. However, they have learned to be *with* what they are doing; they have learned to pay attention to what they are producing and to what the others are producing. When somebody makes a mistake, they are now ready to notice the missing letter, the misplaced or the mispronounced word, etc. And they do something about it. It's interesting to notice that, at the beginning, they assist each other by giving the correct answer instead of helping the other to find it himself but as long as the language is coming from *their* mouths I think that's just fine. Little by little, though, they start using gestures (not necessarily the same as mine) to give help, instead of an answer, to whoever needs it.

Sometimes, when nobody has noticed a mistake that's been made, I “assist” them, for example by clearing my throat.



What has happened up until now has taken place in about four hours (with two breaks in between) and it's here that we stop the demonstration part of the seminar.

## **The First Day With the New Group**

To start off, we have to do something very special because there is a new student, a very shy young Japanese woman, who is a complete beginner.

The first idea that came to me was to work alone with her at the beginning, but then I had a better idea: to have the now "old" students teach her what they learned during the demonstration.

When everybody is present, I ask them what they think of the idea and they agree to try, so I offer the pointer to the group. Paco volunteers to start.

He stands up, I give him the pointer and whisper in his ear to do some work with the vowel sounds. He stands there quietly for a while, looking at the Fidel. To recall what he has internalized from those very first steps and then to try to put all of it together for the new student will certainly be a completely different task.

There is a very dense atmosphere of uncertainty and everybody's concern is visible.

He finally goes to the Fidel. He touches the letter a and, with a gesture, invites her to say something. With a trembling voice, she says a perfect Spanish a. He gestures for her to repeat it. He then touches the u. She hesitates and so does he. He looks at me with an "and now, what?" expression. I show him my support by giving him a look that says, "go on!... continue trying!"

He taps out the u again and looks at her. She tries to produce something but doesn't know what, for her lips tremble. He looks at me again and, without changing my expression, I smile at him. He looks back at her and gives his lips the form they take when our Spanish u is produced.

Very softly, she produces quite a good u. He rounds his lips again and, as if just for himself, he says the sound. She says it too. He looks back at me and I smile at him and calmly look down. He continues by again tapping first the a and then the u. Very timidly she says “a u”. He puts a hand at one ear and gestures for her to repeat what she has said. She says a louder “a u” and he approves it with a nod. However, he immediately turns towards me as if asking for my approval of what he has just accepted. With a gesture I suggest that he see what the others have to say.

Paco looks at the others and one of them makes her own version of the joining gesture, which the new student understands immediately. She says an almost perfect au. He now pays closer attention to her, but once in a while he glances at me before going back to his job. He now taps out i. She says a perfect Spanish i which he accepts, more sure of himself.

Little by little, he shows more security in what he is doing. Little by little, the new student is calmer as well.

He continues with the other vowel sounds and gives her some practice exercises similar to the ones I had done with them, but also inventing his own. He no longer looks at me.

Other students become interested in participating and volunteer to give her other sound combinations. Someone introduces her to the “reversing technique”. They also give her some exercises at different speeds. An atmosphere of camaraderie is beginning to be felt in a matter of half an hour or so.

I am amazed to see how fast the new student has overcome some of her fears; she now seems comfortable and relaxed. I wonder whether I could have done the remarkably good job which those volunteer teachers have done.

The volunteers seem to have developed a sensitivity which lets them know when their student is ready for something else: One of them tries to start working with the consonants, but I sense the heaviness of the task and take over, giving her some combinations with sounds which I have found don't give problems to the Japanese, such as m, c-k-qu and s.

I continue working with the “more complicated ones,” of course, through words and then short sentences. Although I help her find the answer to something that has to be fixed, I now take advantage of having “assistants” who are so attentive to her work and always ready and willing to help her whenever it’s necessary.

## The L and the R: Two Different Sounds

I leave the l and the r for the end, to give some extra practice to the other Japanese students at the same time. I start with her in a way similar to that I had used with the others the day before, now having our experience to our advantage.

I tap out a l, e l, etc. When I have her reverse the sounds, I invite her to pay special attention to the l by tapping the sound several times. The other Japanese now seem to be aware of the value of that sound, so I let one of them (who is eager to assist her) do some modeling for her. She gives no explanations to her in Japanese, but, with gestures, invites her to listen carefully and to notice the position of the tongue in the mouth. They spend some moments working this way and then I tap out some short words like, ala; hola; halo. Then I change the l in the same words into r: ara; hora; haro. I tap out the words once more and invite her to say them very slowly so she can feel and “see” the difference.

Next, I add a new word to the same ones: la hola - la hora; el ala - el haro. At this point we also work at different speeds. Then I introduce her to the line technique:

— — —

(el loro malo)

— — —

(la lima cara)

Later, I give her phrases with more than three words (el loro y la lira; la luna y el toro). I try to be sensitive, though, to *how much* she can take, for the situation she's handling is quite different from what the others had handled at this point. While the others had had a chance to touch other rods before arriving here, she has been asked to take some short-cuts. Nevertheless, she has in her favor something which the others didn't have: a whole group of tremendously generous people around her. One observer commented upon this. "They never seemed to be in a hurry," he told me.

Now I'm back in my seat watching them introduce her to each other's names, for which they use the charts and the Fidel. I'm surprised to notice how familiar they have become with the material. They also give her some words by speaking.

Their mastery of this part of the language is obvious: not once do they turn to me to see whether what's happening is right. They just seem to know it is.

## **Continuing With the Rods**

I had introduced the class to the rods by first working on the needed words and sentences before they actually saw and touched them. Today, my volunteer teachers have decided to take another road instead: Silent Way 1. I find this fits perfectly with the spirit of the class: they have been talking to each other all along, anyway.

To help her reproduce the words, they use chart 1 and the Fidel. They also model the words for her. After introducing her to the colors, they introduce her to the plurals and then to the command dámela/dámelas.

## Meeting Third-Person Situations

It was to this point that I worked with them the previous day, so I leave my seat to introduce them to third-person situations. Before doing it, though, I do something to refresh their minds: I stand in front of the group, take the opened box of rods and put it in front of me. I point at a yellow rod and gesture to them to ask me to take it. “Toma una regleta amarilla,” they say and I offer it to Paco. He tells me, “dámela,” and I give it to him.

I then point at another rod which they ask me to take. I hold it in front of Chisuko, who asks me to give it to her but, instead of doing so, I keep it in my hand and look at the others. After some seconds of complete silence, with the spontaneity of someone who knows what he’s doing, Paco says, “Dásela,” pointing at Chisuko.

Where had he found that word, when he had never heard it before? And why do I think that such a small word was so significant? To put it simply, I would say that such a word was evidence that a criterion for *how the language works* was already developing inside himself. This had been the first chance I had given them to *look* into what they already had, to apply it to something completely different. At that moment I had made no comments, but when we had our feed-back at the end of the class, I had had him go back to that moment and explain to us where the word had come from. He explained that if from damela he had to go somewhere else, the only possibility he had was dasela because, “When we were working on each other’s names we were saying ‘Yo me llamo...’ and me obviously referred to me. And when we talked about somebody else we said, ‘Ella/el se llama...’. Obviously se referred to the third person,” he explained.

“Dasela,” however, can refer to either masculine or feminine —this piece of information is still missing. Therefore, I go to chart 1, point at the word a and immediately turn towards them and point at Chisuko also with the pointer. At once all of them join Paco to say, “¡Dasela a ella!” They separate the first from the second word, but with me doing the joining technique, they instantly recall the elision.

From my seat I watch them practice their new material and integrate it with the masculine and plural:



They now have more roots to support their knowledge of the areas they have touched so far. The time to decide to explore another angle soon arrives:



Yes, he's trying something quite different from what he's sure he *knows*, so he turns towards me as if asking, "How am I doing?" I stand up and go to his side. I gesture to him to start his sentence. He looks at Chisuko and tells her, "Chisuko, por favor toma tres regletas negras y...". I stop him and gesture to Chisuko to take them. "Dámela una ...," he continues and here I do the reversing gesture. "Una dámela," he corrects himself, and I signal he should pay attention. I go to chart 1 and I tap out a mi I go back to him and make him point at himself. He gestures to Chisuko to put the rods back in the box and he starts his statement once more: "Chisuko... toma tres regletas negras y . . . una... dámela a mí..." She takes the rods and gives one to him. I point at the other two rods and he continues on, "Y... dáselas dos...". I stop him without doing anything else and he corrects himself: "y dos... (uh)... y las otras dos dámelas... (uh)... dáselas... ¡a Kimiyo!" I wait to see what they will do next and he decides to start all over once more. I go back to my seat.

After they've had some minutes of practice, I go back and introduce them to a couple of other situations.

I take the box of rods and present it to Kimiyo. "Toma una regleta rosa," I tell her. This is the first time I participate as just another student but I speak at a faster-than-normal speed and with a deliberately low voice. (Indeed, it is a test for her now well-educated ear.) With no preamble whatsoever, she takes a pink rod and I continue: "Toma otra," offering her the box. She quietly looks at me and I touch a pink rod inside the box, taking my hand immediately from the rod. I tell her again, "Toma otra regleta rosa," emphasizing the word otra. She takes it and I continue: "Toma otra," which she does. I gesture to Paco to continue. "Toma otra," he tells her. Then I point at two rods—pink ones, of course. He hesitates, but tries: "Toma dos... otras." I do the reversing gesture. "Toma otras dos," he immediately corrects himself. I then point at three. "¡Toma otras tres!" the others say with him. I then point at five, and so on.

Immediately afterwards, I put a set of ten white rods on the table in front of me. I point at one of them and gesture to the students to tell me to take it. "Toma una regleta blanca," they tell me. Then I point at three and continue until there is only one left. I point at it and they say,

“Toma otra,” which, unfortunately, is not completely correct. I make them *notice* the ones I’m holding as well as the last one. They look at me with a big question-mark look and I go to chart I and point to the word la. “¡Ahhh! . . . itoma la otra!” several say.

Soon, they are producing statements as complicated as this one:

Toma cuatro regletas azules y tres marrón.

(pause)

Las azules dáselas a X,

una marrón dáselas a X <sup>1</sup>

y las otras dámelas a mí.

They manipulate this kind of situation with incredible facility.

To add something else still within the same field of study, I go back to them, take the box of rods and have Chisuko ask Kimiyo to take one rod. When Kimiyo takes it I tell Chisuko, “¡atención!” and go back to the charts and tap out for her the sentence ponla aquí (put it here.) I return to them, take Chisuko’s hand and position it so she is indicating and touching a point near her on the table, like so:



---

<sup>1</sup> Some Spanish-speaking readers may feel uneasy about “una marrón dasela a X.” I certainly have felt tempted to introduce them to the “dale” form, but if I want to make things easier for them at this stage, I would rather wait for a better opportunity to do it.



I then signal her to talk to Kimiyo. Chisuko looks at the rod which Kimiyo is holding and at the place she's pointing at. In a very playful manner she finally tells Kimiyo:



Moments later I show them the words allí (there) and allá (over there) by just pointing at the places that such words represent, and then go back to my seat.



What they have been introduced to up to this moment has had a sequence. It has been presented to them in little pieces which they have been putting together, in the process of making sense of it all. Now a powerful atmosphere of friendship and understanding —both of themselves and the language— is felt. They joke and laugh. They feel comfortable... but I have not looked for artificial means to make them feel comfortable. I have not given them encouragement through artificial smiles or a pat on the back. I have been understanding and careful; I have been *with* them, that's all.

In addition, I have given them the opportunity of *making mistakes* and meeting them just as they are: simple realities in the process of learning. Why hide them or give the impression that mistakes are something horrible? These people, in fact, laugh at them and even find them funny. And I laugh with them too, although being careful about *how* and *with whom* I do it.

## **Solving a New Problem: Writing**

About six hours have gone by (with three breaks in between) and we are coming to the end of the day. After this kind of preparation, my students are indeed ready to solve a new problem: writing.

I take a look at the notebook where I have been jotting down some of the words we have used throughout the day.

The subject matter of the sentences I will give them will be restricted to what we have worked on. As a preamble, I give them a visual dictation using the charts, the Fidel and the words we have written on the blackboard. They respond orally. After this reading and speaking exercise, I mime writing and they take their notebooks and pens. The visual dictation I now give them is similar to the previous one, but now all of them are engaged in the new challenge of writing down what they have mastered orally.

The few examples below will give the readers an idea of the fields of

study we touched upon (not just through the rods) during the first day of work:

Por favor, toma tres regletas blancas y  
pon una aquí, dos allí, y la otra dásela a X.

Gracias.

De nada.

Ahora toma diez azules y dámelas.

¿Cómo se llama la persona que esta allí?

No sé.

¿Y tú, sabes?

No. Yo tampoco sé.

¿Dónde está la regleta negra  
y dónde están las amarillas?

Todas estan aquí.

¿Chisuko esta aquí o está allá?

Chisuko está allí.

The following dialogue, which also formed part of the dictation, is actually an exchange I had with one of them earlier. It shows that I had taken advantage of a special situation where they could *sense* the meaning of what I was putting in front of them. It also shows that we had become so close to each other that we could share our sense of humor:

¿Tú entiendes?

No. No entiendo.

¿No entiendes nada?

No. No entiendo nada.

¿No entiendes absolutamente nada?

No. No entiendo absolutamente nada.

¡Pobrecito!

¿Qué es “pobrecito”?

## Correcting the Sentences

They have the sentences written in their notebooks and I go to the blackboard and divide it into three parts. I write a number at the top of each section:

1.	2.	3.
----	----	----

I take three marking pens and offer them to the group and mime writing while indicating the blackboard. Three volunteers stand up and I gesture to them to take their notebooks. As I give a marking pen to each of them, I show them which of the sentences in their notebooks each is supposed to write. When these three students have finished, I write three more numbers, corresponding to the next three sentences. We continue this way until all of the sentences have been written.

To make the corrections, I use one of my favorite techniques. I stand by the blackboard and pass the pointer through sentence #1. With a questioning look in my eyes, I ask them, “¿Sí?” which for them means is it/he/she correct? with only two choices for an answer, si or no.

(While doing this exercise, I will watch for opportunities to give them alternatives, both for questions and answers.)

They look at the sentence attentively and I wait for the answer. The sentence on the blackboard reads:

Por favor, toma tres regleta blancas y  
ponla una aqui dos alli y la otra da se  
la a ella.

Kimiyo says “No” and I hand her the marking pen and the eraser so she can correct whatever she has found wrong. She adds an s to the word regleta, looks over the sentence and goes back to her seat. Without any special expression on my face I pass the pointer through the sentence again. “¿Si?” I ask them. After a moment of silence, Paco says, “No,” stands up and erases the last two letters in the word ponla. He carefully looks at the sentence again and goes back to his seat. I repeat “¿Si?” and wait. They say, “Si” —not too sure of themselves— and I “underline” da se la with the pointer, making the joining gesture with my fingers. I offer the marking pen and the eraser and another volunteer stands up, erases the three syllables and writes dasela.

There is complete silence and their eyes are fixed on the sentence. I pass the pointer through the sentence once again and this time I don’t ask “¿Si?” but “¿Está bien?” (Is it all right?) They don’t seem to have noticed I have given other words to my question, for they continue looking at the sentence. “¿Está bien?” I ask again. They look at me and at least two voices say a very positive “Sí”. I move my head negatively, and with a facial expression that says, “Sorry, folks!” I gently tell them, “No... no está bien.”

Suddenly it dawns on them that we are using a new expression and that they have picked up its meaning instantaneously. They look at me with amazement, understanding, trust. I again tell them, “No está bien,” point at the accent on the Fidel and “underline” with the pointer the words dasela, aqui and alli. Very softly they say the words, looking for the place where the accents should be. At this point, Chisuko stands up

very calmly and writes an accent on the i of the word aquí and looks at me. I tell her, “Sí, sí” and she continues by writing an accent on the i of allí. She hesitates when coming to the word dasela and I tap out the word on the table with my knuckles. She immediately writes an accent on the first a of the word and goes back to her seat.

They all continue to look at the sentence and I’m amazed to see how easily they give themselves to this job... as if they were willing to give it all the time in the world. I can’t keep myself from showing them my admiration through a smile. “¿Está bien?” I ask them once more and point at the sentence. They look at me with sparkling eyes and one of them says, “Está bien,” emphasizing the first syllable of the first word. I “tap out” the rhythm of the sentence on the table, using the pointer. “¡Está bien!” they say and play with their new discovery, repeating the words over and over.

I go to chart #1 and touch the word sí. Then I “transport” the accent from the Fidel to the i in si and gesture for them to say it and continue. I hear a general, “¡Sí! ¡está bien!” and I continue my questioning: “¿Y, está muy bien?”



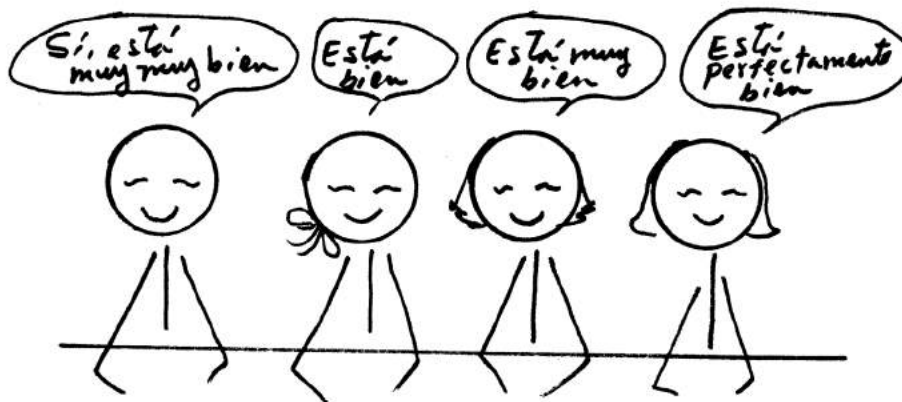
Actually there is still a comma missing, so I tell them, “Bueno. . . está casi perfectamente bien” —during the course we had used the word casi (almost). I “draw” the comma with the pointer, between the words aquí and dos and a volunteer goes up and writes it. The sentence now reads:

Por favor, toma tres regletas blancas

y pon una aquí, dos allí y la otra

dásela a ella.

Continuing on with sentence #2, I don't pass the pointer through it, but only touch the number. “¿Está bien?” I ask them in a very quick manner. The rather short sentence is indeed correct and I see a jubilant expression in everybody's eyes:



We go on to the third one also very short but this time I don't do anything except ask: "¿Y, la tres, está bien?" They look at the sentence and then at me, as if trying to make sense of my new question. "¿Y la tres, está bien?" I ask them once more and point at the number. They look at it. Again, I see sparkling eyes: "Si... la... tres... está bien." I gesture that they should speak faster.

With a very quick movement I turn to Kimiyo: "¿Está perfectamente bien, Kimiyo?" I ask her. "Si. Está perfectamente bien," she assures me.

We continue on with sentence #4: "Y, la cuatro, esta bien?" I ask them, speaking quickly and in a low voice, not even glancing at the sentence. They look at it and find something to be corrected, for several say, "No está bien." I look at the sentence and see that the matters to be corrected are not so serious. "¿Y está muy mal?" I ask them with an expression which implies, "Come on... don't exaggerate!" They carefully look at it again. "No esta muy mal," some timid voices say. "¡Ahhh!... ¿Está un poco mal?" I ask them, making a gesture as I say un poco (a little). "Si... está un poco mal," they tell me in a very reassuring manner... It is just like having a conversation with native speakers of Spanish.

Indeed, I find this stage offers a perfect opportunity to introduce my students to some *ad hoc* expressions. I try, however, to be careful not to overdo the number of such expressions. As we go along, besides keeping track of what I present them with, I bear in mind two things: a) I must always follow a logical sequence, and b) the expressions should —as much as possible— be considered useful and usable in future classes. Sometimes, in fact, I find this to be a very effective way to put them in touch with some grammatical points. In this case, for example, they have been introduced to está, third person, singular of the verb estar (one of the two Spanish equivalents of the verb to be), as well as a couple of adverbs... However, what matters is not the words themselves, but the fact that they have been given the opportunity to meet them by *using* them immediately through real situations, and that the situations have made the meaning crystal clear to them. It's important as well, I think, to consider the fact that they were *ready* for such situations: they knew, for example, how to pronounce Spanish; they had begun to have a *feeling* for how the words sound in Spanish



when they are put together; they had learned to make sense of what was put in front of them...

As important as all of this, is also to consider the personality of the group. In this particular case there was a very lively couple which helped to create a really joyful atmosphere all the way through the course. They were always trying to get new words from me so they could joke with each other... and the others didn't mind joining at times.

When arriving at this stage, in fact, I have found a similar spirit among the many groups I have worked with, especially when starting with beginners. Something I can see behind this is a *readiness* in them to play the role of being native speakers. Here is one more example: when we were in the process of correcting this group's written sentences, we came upon a very long one that had been written without a single mistake. As the others found that out, they didn't keep silent. At least two voices whispered "Wow!" I immediately tried to give them words for the idea they were expressing. Pointing at my head and at the student who had written the sentence, I said, "¡Muy inteligente! ¿Eh?". Being as expressive as I am, my words were evidently accompanied by some "special Mexican gestures." Some of them immediately "agreed with me" by using my words and my gestures, and someone also jokingly "disagreed," using my body gestures as well.

I think these are perfect examples of the times when a *real situation* generates an opportunity for them to be immersed in the culture I'm representing. On this particular occasion it had evidently been worthwhile to give the Japanese a chance to take their time and *touch* at their own pace the different characteristics of the new language they were learning. To see them opening hidden doors in the walls surrounding their own culture reminded me of myself as one who has lived in different countries. It has been easier for me to understand the people I've been surrounded by, only when I feel integrated in their community even if my knowledge of the language was minimal. But I know that this *attempt* to integrate myself only happens when I'm *ready* for it. I also take my time.

## The Second Day

It's a pleasant morning and I feel recharged and ready to continue uncovering new mysteries. The empty classroom makes me feel impatient. No, after yesterday's class I have not sat down to prepare a program for today. A moment of reflecting on what happened yesterday has been enough. After a good night's sleep I feel comfortable.

The first students arrive and I greet them with "buenos días." As the others arrive they are greeted the same way by the first ones. As long as the early comers are sitting down all ready to start, I hand the pointer to our now-not-too-shy Kimiyo, so she can show us buenos días on the Fidel. As she is doing it, the last two participants arrive, Chisuko and Paco, the "lively couple." They, of course, are welcomed with the same greeting, which doesn't seem to represent any difficulty for understanding. They solemnly answer, "Buenos días."

Sitting in the group this morning, there is a "guest" participant, Carlos, who already knows some Spanish. Carlos can't resist trying his Spanish with the two who have just arrived and asks, "¿Cómo estás?" (How are you? —second person, singular). His greeting puts a big question mark in everybody's eyes, especially the eyes of the ones to whom the question has been directed. Complete silence. Carlos repeats the question and, with great concern, the less shy member of the couple, Paco, mumbles the words several times to himself as if to keep them from escaping. Now Carlos points to Paco and asks him, "¿Estás bien? ¿Estás mal?" Paco points to himself and says, "Yo..." and his expression suddenly changes. The meaning has obviously come to him: Slowly and still pointing at himself he says, "Yo esto b—" ...I quickly call his attention and show him the word bien on chart #4. "¡Ahhh..., isí! ¡Yo esto bien!" He happily says and I see smiles of satisfaction all around. However, there is still something to be fixed in that statement and I have to disappoint them.

Although Paco and Chisuko are still standing up, I don't want to interrupt the magic of what is going on by making them sit down. So, I again call his attention and have him repeat his answer. Using a finger technique, I "put" the words on three of my fingers and have him say his sentence,

and then again. This time, when he arrives at the word esto I make a sad expression and point to my head to let him know there is something special about that word. Everybody looks at me. Still pointing to the esto finger, I look at Carlos to see if he knows the word, which he does. He says, “estoy,” so I turn to Paco, shrugging my shoulders. As if he had found a treasure but doesn’t know what to do with it, he says to himself, “Yo estoy bien.” He accepts it, though, and this is shown as he suddenly turns to Carlos and, pointing to him, carefully asks him, “¿Y tú...es... bien?” Carlos and others in the group say at once, “¡estás!”

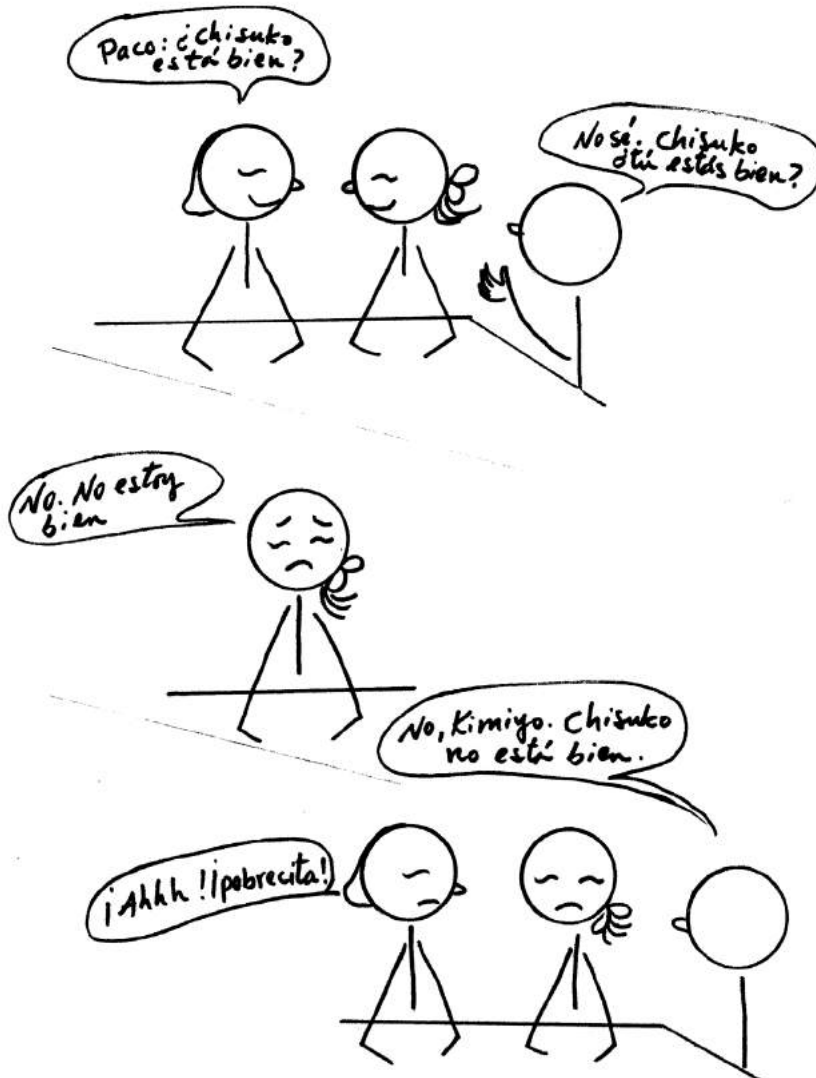
This time, totally sure of himself, Paco asks Carlos, as if it were for the first time, “Y, tú ¿estás bien?”, to which Carlos replies, “Yo no estoy bien porque yo no entiendo español” (I’m not okay because I don’t understand Spanish). I know this answer is too much for the others since they are real beginners. Hence, I save the situation by continuing the dialog with Carlos for a little while.

Then I stop and go back to a point where the others can have a chance to clarify, to attach roots to the most useful aspects of the interchange that has taken place.

I start with Kimiyo, who has been rather quiet. I turn to her and, with a clear voice but at a normal pace I ask her, “¿Tú estás bien, Kimiyo?” She quietly looks at me and after a second of silence, she answers, “Si... yo est...”. The others assist her. “Estoy,” they whisper.. “Sí, yo estoy bien,” she timidly repeats. I make my usual gesture for speed, followed by the one for rhythm. “Sí, yo estoy bien,” she tells me again, but this time sitting up boldly. “¿Estás muy bien?” I continue asking her, now at a faster-than-normal pace. “Si, yo estoy muy bien,” she assures me. And I insist: “¿Y estás muy muy bien?”

She is speaking so perfectly that I feel the impulse to use one of my techniques to let her know that the pronoun (yo) is actually not necessary. Something else, however, tells me to leave things the way they are... that doing more might complicate what has been accomplished. In other words, I have decided to appreciate —to *be with*— what she has accomplished.

I go to sit on my chair and watch them ask questions to each other related to the subject. I enormously enjoy their self-assurance and their well developed spirit of creativity.



Soon, Paco decides to get back to Carlos and asks him, “¿Tú no estás bien?” To which Carlos replies, “No, yo no estoy bien.” Wanting to continue, Paco gives me a look with which he tells me, “May I try something?” and asks Carlos, “Pourquoi tú no estás bien?” Yes, he has tried his French (a romance language, after all!) and the word order in his question is perfect. To provide help, I show him the word por on chart #2 and que on chart #1. Very relaxed, rocking back on his chair, he asks Carlos once more, “¿Por qué tú no estás bien?” (Why aren’t you okay?) “Porque yo no hablo español,” Carlos answers.

As this dialog goes on, I write the new words on the blackboard:

estoy

español

hablo

por qué

porque

They look at the words I have written and most of them choose to dwell on the word hablo murmuring the word, they look at me. To answer their implicit question I put one of my hands at my mouth and flap my fingers while saying



I see their “I’ve got it” look and I quickly turn to Chisuko and ask her, “¿Tú, hablas español?” to which she replies, “Yo no hablo español.” Although that could be a good answer, I use the finger technique so she can give a complete answer (No. Yo no hablo español.) With a gesture I invite the same student to say something to someone else and move away.

## Following the Students

At this point Carlos has to leave. I ask myself whether we should stop and continue working on what we were doing with the rods the day before. I look at the whole picture of what has happened up to this moment. I know that in my many years of experience these little pieces of wood have been tremendously useful visual material with which my students have arrived at fluency in Spanish. But, at the same time, I know that those years of experience have also taught me not to depend on rods for everything.

Today we have had a special guest and things have gone in a certain direction... and that’s the truth. I have then to be faithful to the reality in front of me. My challenge now will be to help them put into practice their work of yesterday as well as to put in order what has happened today, to integrate all.

“¿Tú hablas español?” I ask Paco very quickly and in a purposely low voice. “No. Yo no hablo español,” he answers, but I contradict him: “Si Si hablas español...un poquito,” I tell him. Then I wave good-bye, saying, “¡Adiós!” and move away from them. While they are conversing, I add a couple more words to the blackboard.

estoy

español

hablo

por qué

porque  
hablas  
poquito  
adiós

When the right time comes to expand the field, I go back to them and stand in front of Paco. I point at myself and tell him, “Yo hablo español, y tú?” Pointing to himself, he says, “Yo hablo... en... in...”. As he starts pulling out the word, I go to the Fidel and tap out inglés which he follows as I move the pointer. I then turn to Chisuko and ask her, at a faster-than-normal speed, “Y tú, ¿qué hablas?” And as I ask the question I emphasize the word qué and make this gesture:



Very sure of herself, she answers, “Yo hablo...” Before she says anything else, I tap out for her the word japonés on the Fidel.

In the meantime, I add some new words to the ones written on the blackboard: inglés qué japonés.

## **During the Break**

What has happened in the classroom has been so engaging that the same atmosphere lingers on during the break. When I announce that we can stop, they remain seated, still meditating on the words written on the blackboard. Then, silently, they walk into the adjoining room and begin taking cups to help themselves to coffee or tea.

Chisuko suddenly breaks the silence. She decides to offer something to drink to the others. Giving a Spanish pronunciation to the English words coffee and tea, she asks the others, “cofi? . . . ti?” Since this particular day there are at least two observers who know Spanish, I point at the coffee pot and ask them what it is. They say café, and then I point at the tea pot and they say té. Our “hostess” now asks her husband, “¿Café?... té?” One of the observers provides the complete question:

“¿Quieres café o té?” (Would you like coffee or tea?) Following the spirit of the dialogs that have taken place minutes before, they are soon offering things like cookies (galletas) to each other.

At one point Paco decides to bring in something he has learned in the classroom: pointing at Chisuko’s empty cup, he asks her, “¿Tú quieres café o té?”

She replies, “Yo quiero té.”

“¿Por qué no quieres café?” he inquires with a look of triumph.

The other breaks, including the one for lunch, were taken in the same spirit. I noticed, however, that although they used me and the observers as sources of new words, they didn’t go wild. This told me that perhaps they had acquired a criterion of *how much* extra vocabulary they could handle. It was remarkable as well, that sometimes, during the last breaks, they preferred to keep silence rather than change to English or Japanese when they got stuck.

What I could see in these two facts was that they had developed a liking for the language they were learning... and how easily they had gotten to this point!

## **Back in the Classroom**

It’s after the first break and we are back in the classroom. They look very attentively at the words written on the blackboard and read them (with no invitation from me to do so). I wait for them to let me know



when they are ready for something else, but they become quiet. They have been so playful and talkative minutes before, that I find this switch rather interesting. They finally look at me with their “and now what?” look.

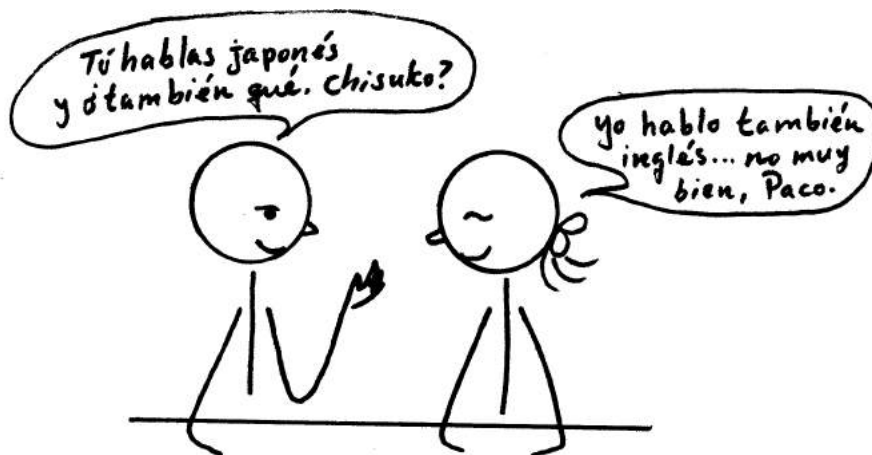
I go to Kimiyo and make her point at herself. I then go to the blackboard and show her the word hablo. She immediately says, “Yo hablo japonés.” I gesture for her to repeat her statement at a faster pace and more rhythmically. She repeats her statement as if she were a real native speaker of Spanish. I then point at myself, looking at her. The whole group immediately joins her in saying, “¡Tú hablas español!” and I move out of the picture.

After a while, I rejoin them and gesture for Chisuko to keep silence. While pointing at her, I look at the others. Several voices say, “Ella... habl... a... japonés.” Of course, they already have the ingredients to guess the ending of the third person form of the verb.

At this point some of them, being teachers themselves, begin taking advantage of the usefulness of our silent communication techniques, which have already formed a bond of understanding among us. “Yo hablo inglés y da-da-da japonés,” Paco says to me pointing at himself. The word he obviously wants is también (also), so I show it to him on chart #1. He then puts into words what he has in his mind:



He then continues his questioning with Chisuko:

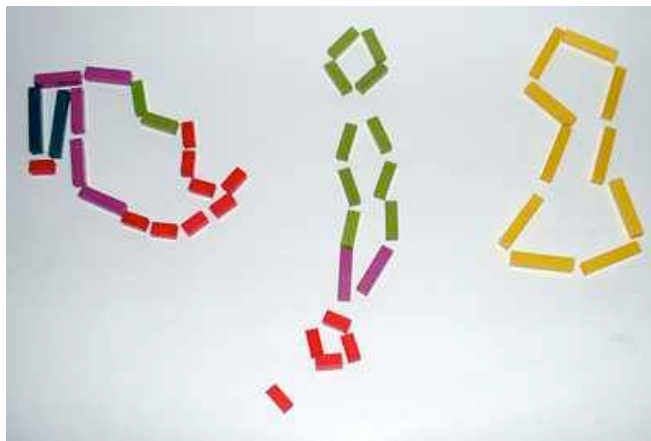


This subject is letting us know a little more about each other. Having such a discussion in the target language must certainly feel like an accomplishment to the students.

Paco continues on with Kimiyo:



Something occurs to me that could fit this subject. I take the box of rods and make up our three countries, Japan, England and Mexico.



Since I had left out the personal pronouns in the plural form, I use this situation to introduce them. I point at Chisuko, Kimiyo and one of the women observers. With my hand I “draw” an imaginary circle to hold them together. I go to the charts and point at nos and otra on chart #2 and at the s on chart #1, followed by our sign for joining. They immediately say nosotras (we, fem.) with an expression of doubt. I “draw” the circle again, putting them inside of it. Now I see a glint in somebody’s eyes. “¡Ah!... Nosotras!” she says, pointing to each of them and “drawing” our imaginary circle. Next, I put a hand to my mouth and flap my fingers as I did when I gave them the meaning of hablo and immediately go to chart #3 and point at mos. Here I hear hablamos, there I hear hablomos. I point at the student who has said hablamos and we continue on with all the persons of the verb hablar (to speak) and soon we have it conjugated on the blackboard.

yo hablo  
tú hablas  
él/ella habla  
nosotros/as hablamos  
ustedes hablan  
ellos/as hablan

I move away from them so they can talk to each other. I don't go back to my chair, though, because now I must become a participant representing Mexico. I turn towards the three countries made of rods and point at "Japan." I go to the Fidel and tap out Japón, using the pointer to transport the accent to the letter o and continue this way with the other two "countries" (Inglaterra and México). Then, I put my finger down on the shape that represents Mexico and tell them:



"Mmm? . . . What's that?" I read in their eyes. So, I take some other rods and stand them up inside "México". I point at one of the rods and say, "Mi papá," and then I point at another one and say, "Mi mamá." Paco finds this so funny that he starts laughing heartily. His laughing is so contagious that the others, including myself, laugh too. "Mi papá... mi mamá," he repeats my words laughingly, and then looks at me and asks me, "¿sí?" as if to say, "Yes, what about your papá and your mamá?" So, I continue: "Gracias, Paco.. Yo, mi papá, mi mamá, etcétera, etcétera... aquí (pointing at different places inside the "country"... hablamos español. En México hablamos español." As I say the word en, I tap the center of the figure several times; and as I say the word México I circle the "country" with a finger.

I certainly don't know whether what I have presented to them has been clear.., whether it has been the right thing. I even have a feeling I've made a mistake. To find that out, I move away.



I was afraid they were going to stress the words papá and mamá, for example. I thought they could possibly have used this opportunity to move into another subject. I am happily surprised to see that they have taken only what fits into what they have been working on. What they are clearly showing me is that they have acquired the discipline to stay faithful to what *they know that they know*. What is it taking place

in themselves that has made this possible? Which potentials of their minds have they put to work and *how* are those potentials playing their roles? Are they possibly aware of what is happening?

As amazed as I was at that moment, a year ago, when such questions came to my mind while watching those students, I'm still more amazed now to find that these experiences of mine have been real eye openers to my understanding of what *learning* is about. I'm amazed to discover that in order to find a clearer understanding of the subject, I have to go to *myself*: watching carefully what I do and how I do it, not just in the classroom.

I can't stop myself as well from wondering how many teachers in the world become truly interested in the subject, when what we normally see in our educational system is teachers running from one place to another searching *outside themselves* for means to motivate their students. For we live in a world which is terribly conditioned; a world that forces us to feel that our work will be valid only if it looks "professional": if it is footnoted with endless lists of famous names. In our formal education there seems to be no place for courses that could sensitize us to our students through *the investigation of our own functioning*.

## **The Verb Estar Contrasted With the Verb Ser (Both Meaning To Be)**

Something else is now added to the subject, which, in fact, *they* bring into circulation. With a look as brilliant as a sunray, Chisuko tells me, "Yo hablo japonés... porque yo... ¿estoy japonés?" Before answering her I look at the others and I notice a beautiful expression which tells me that they understand what she's talking about. "No, no está muy bien, Chisuko," I answer her. There are, indeed, two matters we have to work on before her statement is correct. I start by working on the simpler one: I myself say the first two or three words of her sentence and signal for her to continue. When she gets to the last word (japonés for the second time) I make my lengthening gesture. She says, "japonés-s", with an expression of "that sounds awful!" So I tell her, "No, no," and I

draw a doll on the blackboard and make a feminine wiggle. Then I go to the Fidel and point at the letter a. Finally, I again touch the finger I used to show lengthening. “¡Japonesa!” she almost shouts. I immediately gesture to her to start all over.

They show no special reaction when I let them know there is still something else to be corrected. She says her sentence once more and when she gets to the word estoy I tell her, “¡atención!” and go to the blackboard and write:

estoy/soy

I point at estoy, make a negative gesture and cross it out. Then I point at soy. “¿Yo soy Japonesa?” she asks me. “Si, Chisuko,” I answer. All of them look at the blackboard and read the words as if just for themselves, but don’t seem especially surprised or bothered.

They become interested in seeing the conjugations of the two verbs on the blackboard. I encourage them to guess the ending of each person except for tú eres (you are, singular) and ella/el es (she/he is) which are very irregular. I write these myself.

I find it fascinating that although the endings on the verb estar (except for the first person, singular) follow the endings of the verb llamarse, the accents on the verb estar don’t seem to have bothered them. It seems as if they have just accepted this reality as illogical as it must have appeared to them. We soon have the two verbs conjugated:

yo estoy	soy
tú estás	eres
él/ella está	es
nosotros/as estamos	somos
ustedes están	son
ellos/as están	son

“Entonces Chisuko... ¿Tú eres japonesa?” I ask her. “Si, yo soy

japonesa,” she answers. Minutes later they are producing statements like the following:

Yo soy de Japón. (Yo) soy japonesa. (Yo) hablo japonés.

El es de Inglaterra y habla inglés pero también habla francés.

Tú eres de México pero ahora estás en Japón.

Susana dice que (ella) no habla inglés muy bien.

¿De dónde es Susana en México?

(Ella) es de Guadalajara.

¿Tú crees que Chisuko no habla inglés muy bien?

Yo creo que (ella) habla muy bien.

Indeed, all the statements and questions were related to each other and everybody was speaking quite seriously. And, as seriously, Paco told us at one point, “Yo no entiendo el japonés que la mamá de Chisuko habla porque ella habla el japonés de X.” I then turned to Chisuko and asked her, “¿El japonés de X es muy diferente, Chisuko?” “Sí, es muy diferente,” she answered.

It would be practically impossible to describe each of the situations that happened during this course. Maybe some readers are asking themselves how I introduce matters like gracias, por favor, pero, and ¿tú entiendes? for example. To put it simply, each of the words or expressions were introduced when they fit the situation, when they were needed, and when they *made sense to the students*.

I made sure, however, as a discipline, to make them reappear over and over on further occasions. I will give one example: the case of no sé (I don’t know) and yo tampoco sé (I don’t know either).

This happened on the first day when the “old students” had introduced Kimiyo to each other’s names. To give Kimiyo extra practice, I came in front of the group and asked her the same questions the others had been asking her: ¿Cómo te llamas? ¿Cómo me llamo yo? etc. I did this mostly



because of the size of the group, meaning for her to hear somebody else's voice.

After she told me what the names of the others were, I pointed to my husband, who was there as an observer, and asked her, “¿Cómo se llama él?” (What's his name?). She looked at him and then at me with an expression on her face that clearly told me “I don't know.” I looked back at her with the same kind of expression and went to the charts and pointed at the words no and se which were the words she needed to be able to communicate to me what she was implying. With no hesitation she told me, “No sé,” (without the right intonation). To help her find it, I tapped out the intonation of the sentence with my knuckles on the table. “No sé,” she immediately corrected herself. Then I turned to Paco and asked him, “¿Y tú sabes cómo se llama él?” I found it rather interesting that he answered “No sabo” (which is the form Spanish-speaking children use when they are figuring out the language.) I somehow thought he would use Kimiyo's words, but obviously he was stressing something else at that moment. As soon as I moved my head negatively, he immediately recalled the other form (no sé). I then turned to Chisuko and asked her, “¿Y tú? —¿Tú sabes cómo se llama él?” She answered, “No sé,” but with the words coming out of her mouth there was something else: there was an attitude, it was her body, her whole self expressing what she was saying.

To help her give a more complete answer, I went to chart #3 and pointed at the word tampoco. She immediately said, “No sé tampoco,” which indeed can be correct. However, to put her in touch with at least another possibility to express the same thought, I wrote her statement (No sé tampoco) on the blackboard. I then covered the word no with one hand, showed her yo on chart #2 and made the reversing gesture. She and others as well said “Yo tampoco sé.”

This and other similar situations have shown me how this natural power of the mind (of instantly visualizing a set of words which together make sense) can be strengthened through very simple exercises.

## The End of the Course

I glance at my watch and notice that we have only about one hour left to work (our seven hours are almost gone!). It seems to me almost impossible and I wish we could go back in time. I have to forget about having a feedback session and I hope there will be enough time to correct the sentences I will dictate now as our final step. I may even have to forget about one of my greatest delights: to see my students play the role of the teacher when it comes time for correcting the written sentences on the blackboard.

Again, I look at my notes and at the blackboard. As I did yesterday, I first give them a visual dictation. Then I give them some sentences to write. The sentences, of course, will be based on what we have worked on during the day. This time, however, I add something else: once in a while I dictate a question and instruct them to leave a space below (intended for the answer to the question), like this:

1.	5.	9.
2.	6. ¿Por qué Chisuko habla Japonés?	10.
3. ¿De dónde soy yo en México?	-	11.
-Tú ...	7.	
4.	8.	12.

I have to let them know that they are supposed to write an answer to the questions. Therefore I write the first word for the answer

to item No. 3 (tú), I point at myself and then gesture for them to continue. As for item No. 6, I don't write the first word (as I did for item No. 3) but I *say* it (porque), miming writing, and then indicate they should continue.

All the sentences are now written on the blackboard, but there is not time left to correct them. Just a few words of mutual thanks in an atmosphere of joy, and then it's all over. The classroom is empty again.

### **“What Would You Have Done Afterwards?”**

It's a question I suppose I could expect from some readers. One thing, for sure: correction of the sentences with the students taking the lead. Then a reading exercise of the corrected sentences.

After the class, I would certainly have sat down to make some new charts containing their words (the ones not already included in Gattegno's charts), which, of course are always different for every group I teach. I simply use large sheets of white paper and a regular marking pen. At this stage, and for this language in particular, colors aren't necessary.

Something I normally do when presenting my students with the new charts is to point at different words to see if there is any doubt about meanings. A good follow-up exercise is to have them write sentences using some words taken from the “new charts” as well as others taken from Gattegno's. In fact, in my teaching experience with hundreds of students from places like Korea, Spain, France and Saudi Arabia, I have made some interesting observations: first of all, their sentences are short and simple and seem to reflect what they are sure they *know*. Interesting as well is that I have not found a case in which anyone looks at her/his

notes for help in making up a sentence. Instead, they stay quiet for a while as if to let the sentences come to them.

A follow-up exercise I have used is to put some question words on the blackboard. (In our case, it would be qué, dónde, cómo, por qué.) Next, I ask them to write a question with each word. They might then exchange notebooks so somebody else could write the answer.

## **And What Next?**

More than preparing exercises or a program for the students, a Silent Way teacher works on getting a better understanding of her/his own human potentials (sensitivity, affectivity, intelligence, intuition, etc.) and how those potentials relate to those of the students. For it's true that such potentials were given to all of us inhabitants of planet Earth, and it's true as well that our own individuality, our own circumstances lead us to use those potentials differently.

What would come next, then, would have to depend on what I had learned from them in the above sense. It would depend on what they possessed of the Spanish language up to the moment we left the last class. What would come next would have to take into account the personality they developed as a group, as well as their own interests. Finally, it would have to take into account *the unexpected*, the continuous descent of the unknowable future.