Teaching in Real Time
(The Silent Way in Action)

by Robert J. Schalkoff

Introduction

At present, there are approximately 60 native speakers of English employed as Assistant English Teachers (AET's) by Yamaguchi Prefecture, its various counties, cities, towns and sometimes private educational institutions. Their main function is to provide assistance to full-time Japanese teachers of English (JTE's) in the preparation and implementation of team-taught English classes in the prefecture's schools. Some AET's teach at the junior high level exclusively, others at the senior high level exclusively, others at both and most recently others are teaching at elementary schools as well. Whether an AET teaches at one school or at a number of schools within a school district is at the discretion of their immediate employers.

While some AET's have undergone professional teacher training and have experience as teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) prior to coming to Japan, many are teaching English for the first time. As a result, the Japanese Ministry of Education, through each prefecture, including Yamaguchi, provides for a number of opportunities throughout the school year for teacher training workshops. Most of these workshops deal appropriately with the team-teaching of English, as this is the form of teaching that almost all AET's engage in. However, due to budgetary and scheduling difficulties, the AET's of Yamaguchi Prefecture attend most of these workshops minus their Japanese counterparts.

I was approached by the prefectural AET coordinator in August, 2000 to give one of these workshops in October of the same year. I was informed that the workshop would be approximately two hours in length, that all of the AET's working in Yamaguchi would attend, that their Japanese counterparts would not be attending and that the title of the workshop, as dictated by the Ministry of Education, would be Effective Team Teaching. However, I was informed that the actual content of the workshop would be left up to me. I agreed to give the workshop on the stipulation that I would be able to add my own subtitle to the already established Effective Team Teaching one. This was deemed acceptable and I begin contemplating what I could do given the time restraints and the facts that 1) all of the AET's attending the workshop work in very different situations from each other, 2) some of the AET's would be two and three year veterans while others would only have had a little over two months experience (new AET's begin teaching in September) and 3) sometimes individual AET's work at a number of different levels within any given school week.

Planning the workshop

Taking the above conditions into consideration, I immediately decided that I would have to

do something that would meet four requirements. First, it would have to challenge both the veterans and the new comers. Second, it would have to be broad enough in scope to give teachers at each of the different levels some insight into what they might do at their particular level. Third, it would have to be something that the AET's could implement on their own as their Japanese counterparts would not be attending. Fourth and most importantly, it would have to be something that would create a positive impact on the way AET's teach English in the schools.

In order to meet all of these requirements, I immediately realized that it was going to be impossible to deal primarily with "activities." Activities would be too limiting and focusing on them would always leave one group of teachers out. In addition, activities would only temporarily impact the way the AET's taught, i. e., the activities would be good for teaching a certain part of English with little or no carry over into working with other parts. Therefore, I ruled out doing a presentation that would involve me teaching the AET's some new "gimmicks" per se. At the same time, I realized that an overly broad theoretically based workshop might not be accessible to some of the newer teachers and that it also might not be practical enough for the AET's to take back to their classrooms and put to use.

The idea of a theoretical yet practical workshop however, did appeal to me. There are a number of reasons why. Having a theoretical base would give us the advantage of looking at the "big picture" of language teaching. It would allow teachers who had different levels of experience to talk about teaching with each other. At the same time, if several practical applications of the theory could be presented, teachers might be able to see how it could apply to their particular and different situations. Giving the the workshop a theoretical base would also give the participants something that they could keep coming back to to apply to different situations and teaching content, i. e., it would not be "part specific" as say an activity would be. Finally, if the theory could be presented in an economical way so that its practice would be apparent, the AET's would be able to take it home and use it in their classrooms immediately. They might also be able to discuss what we had done with their Japanese counterparts.

It was here that I began to collate some theoretical ideas that I might use to structure a discussion in the workshop. These ideas came primarily from the work that I had been doing with the Silent Way approach to teaching foreign languages. Before detailing some of them, I think it might be best to give a brief description of what the Silent Way is as well as how it is practiced. In doing this I will rely heavily upon the work of Roslyn Young, one of its most respected practitioners and theoreticians.

The Silent Way

The Silent Way is the name by which Caleb Gattegno's approach to teaching languages is known. (His approaches to teaching other subjects have different names.) It is based on four major observations made by Gattegno. First, *students do not learn because teachers teach.* Thus, if teachers want to know about what to do in the classroom, they need to study learning and the learners. The best place to do this, insists Gattegno, is to study oneself when learning.

Gattegno in studying himself, realized that only his awareness could be educated. The Silent Way, indeed all of his approaches to teaching, is therefore designed to produce awarenesses not provide students with knowledge.

In studying others, he saw people, who regardless of their age or mental abilities, were strong, intelligent, independent and genuinely talented learners. Watching people learn, he recognized that they brought with them a number of attributes to their learning. Among these, their intelligence, their will, their need to know and a long string of successes at mastering things more challenging than any task found in schools. Gattegno realized that teachers had two choices: find ways to promote the use of these attributes or find ways that would not. Teachers using the Silent Way choose to do the former. One result of this is that the teacher never does work for students that they can do for themselves, i. e. they do not give students answers they can give themselves. In comparison with other approaches, the teacher is in this way mostly "silent," hence the name, the Silent Way.

Second, in looking at language, *Gattegno makes a clear distinction between communication and self expression.* To him, communication is often a miraculous event. It occurs only when both parties show a sensitivity and an openness to each other's message. This is not easily dealt with in a classroom. Self expression, on the other hand can be worked on by students with a teacher, i. e., expressions of thoughts, feelings, opinions, observations, etc. can be effectively dealt with in the language classroom.

Third, for Gattegno, t*he true test of knowing is to have criteria for what is right or wrong.* In order to develop criteria, students need to do a thorough exploration of both. Of course, mistakes are a natural part of this and therefore essential to learning. Students need teachers to provide clear and instant feedback, i. e., to let them know what is right and what is wrong, so that they can develop their own criteria. Once it is developed, the student stands on their own. In terms of language, the student who knows a language possesses the ability to distinguish between what a native speaker of that language would say and what they would not say in any given circumstance.

Fourth, *Gattegno believes that knowledge does not become know-how.* Common sense, he tells us, shows that one does not learn how to play the piano by reading about it. One learns by playing it. Therefore, one does not learn how to speak a foreign language by studying a lot of rules about it, one learns it by speaking it.

Theory and practice in the workshop

These four basic principles helped form the theoretical basis of the workshop. It was here that I began to contemplate a way to work with these ideas that would be both easily accessible and at the same time practical in nature. I decided to create a list of statements in handout form to be distributed to the participants. The statements would have to meet a number of requirements. First, I wanted them to provocative in nature in the hope that the participants would be intrigued enough by them to discuss them. The statements would also have to be general enough

so that they would apply to any language teaching situation and they would have to be written in laymen's terms. I wanted them to be short enough so that they would be easily remembered and I also wanted them to have immediate practical applications in any of the participants' classrooms. In regard to the latter, I myself would prepare a number of examples or experiences that I could give to the participants to demonstrate the practical application of any of the statements. While I thought that giving the participants problems or experiences that they could use to contemplate the statements would be more powerful than just giving examples, I realized that under the time constraints this would not be entirely possible. Therefore, I set about preparing both experiences and examples. The statements that I arrived at can be found below in Figure 1. There are eleven in all and I believe that each fits the requirements I have outlined above. More detail on each will be given in the next section.

Figure 1

Teaching in Real-Time

Robert Schalkoff

1. Students can talk more if you talk less.
2. Knowing *about* something and knowing *how* to do it are two different things.
3. Give experiences not explanations.
4. Everything the students say in class must be true.
5. Images and experiences lead to retention, memorizing leads to forgetting.
6. Do as much as possible with as little as possible.
7. Or is one of the most important words in a teacher's vocabulary.
8. What do students need me for and what do they *not* need me for?
9. Don't do the students' work for them.
10. Repetition is not practice.
11. People like to talk about themselves. Students are people, too.

Next, I contemplated the format the workshop would have. I wanted an open format that would leave room for the participants to go where they needed to go but at the same time work with the statements. I decided that prior to working with the list of statements, I would ask all of the participants to answer three questions, the answers to which they were to write on large file cards I provided them with. The questions were, 1) Where do you teach, how often and to who, 2) What is the most challenging aspect of your teaching and 3) What do you hope to gain from this workshop. After answering these questions the participants would discuss the answers to them with the person(s) seated next to them. Following the discussion, I would have the participants report briefly on their discussions regarding the first two questions to the whole group. In this way all of us, myself included, would have some idea of what everyone's individual situations and challenges were. I also thought that some common themes of concern might come out of such work and that this might lead directly into work on the list of statements. I was rather confident that given the nature of the statements this would be possible.

Following the reports, we would deal with the statements. My plan was to hand out the statements and then ask people to comment on one that intrigued them or one that they could relate to. I would lead the resulting discussion that followed, asking for more input and giving examples and experiences where appropriate.

The workshop

The workshop proceeded along the lines outlined above. In the first half, the participants seemed very keen on talking about their situations and challenges with each other. Honestly speaking, I was quite worried that they would not find this type of discussion very interesting. In working with large groups of AET's in the past, I had found them to be rather mercurial in their willingness to work on the topics being presented. This certainly was not the case at this particular workshop. I noticed that the majority of the AET's were absorbed in discussing their work. This enthusiasm carried over into the report phase of the first half of the workshop. While individual AET's reported on where they and their partner(s) worked and what their challenges were, I set about the task of jotting down the key points of their reports on the white board in the front of the room. As I had anticipated a number of common themes began to emerge in their challenges that crossed the barrier of their students' English levels. These themes included being frustrated by the amount of translation into Japanese in the classroom, motivating students (especially third year students at the junior and senior high levels), trying to get Japanese teachers of English (JTE's) to move away from using the textbook, frustration with lessons that are team taught but not team planned, the lack of discipline in the classroom, always doing the same thing in lessons, e.g., self introductions, the inability to see progress in students as the result of not seeing them regularly, trying to help students move away from katakana pronunciation, trying to keep their own and student energy levels high in the classroom, basic skills not being developed before students must move on to the next step, etc. There were a number of other themes common to many AET's that did not directly involve teaching per se, but that certainly impacted their teaching. Most of these centered around their relationships with JTE's.

Before the workshop began, I had asked the AET's to stay away from interpersonal challenges when listing things about their job that challenged them. In doing this, I explained that there was only so much that we could deal with in our limited time and that I thought we could best spend our time talking about teaching. This proved to be almost impossible as the relationships that the AET's had with their Japanese counterparts seemed to penetrate almost every aspect of our discussions. Some of the things with which the AET's were concerned were helping the JTE's relax more around them, working more with the JTE's in planning lessons, getting the JTE's to see that the AET's could make more of a contribution to what was happening in the classroom, asking the JTE's to do less translation and trying to get the JTE's to discipline problem students.

As this reporting continued, I became aware of a definite "us" and "them" type of attitude on the part of the AET's towards the JTE's. Many AET's actually used the word "them" when talking about the JTE's and I saw that comments about the JTE's were the most charged and found the most sympathy with others in the group. As this area lies somewhat outside the realm of teaching and more in the realm of intercultural understanding, I tended for the most part in the second half of the workshop to address it but not to do anything that would further inflame it, i. e., I tried not to take sides and at the same to offer some suggestions for positive non-threatening action that could be taken by the AET's to address some of their concerns to the JTE's.

While the AET's reported on their discussions, I had been reluctant to make comments on their contributions. I assumed an active listening type stance, asking for clarification if there was something that was unclear and paraphrasing what I had heard to make sure that I had understood the intent of what they were saying. While I was doing this, I debated on whether to comment on their reports after they had finished or to just hand out the list and weave my comments into those discussions. In the end, I decided to stick with my original plan and did the latter.

The participants were indeed quite intrigued by the statements on the list and a lively discussion began almost immediately. A number of the statements were particularly of interest to the group. They were numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10 and 11. The other statements came into play as a result of work with these. *Repetition is not practice* sparked a discussion as to what practice exactly is. AET's were frustrated that much of their time is spent as human tape recorders, i. e., they say a phrase in the text book and the students repeat after them. They spoke of students mindlessly repeating phrase after phrase in the classroom. Some of the AET's thought that this as well other factors lead to discipline problems. I have to say that I agreed with them. In thinking about my own learning of foreign languages, this certainly was the case. Repetition exercises bored me terribly. However, I told the AET's that I did believe something that might look like repetition at first glance might have some place in the classroom. Specifically, that just rote repetition can be turned into quite a challenging activity for practicing melody, intonation, pronunciation and rhythm. I asked one of the AET's to tell me about something he liked in Japanese. He said, "Nihon ryori ga dai suki desu. (I love Japanese food.)" I then asked him to say it again and this time be more careful with the pronunciation of the second word. He did so. I then told him not to place too much accent on the third word and a little more on the fourth word. He did so. Then, I had him work at saying the phrase much quicker and smoother than he had been. In this way he probably said his sentence four or five times but he never once "repeated" what he had done the time before each time he said it. It was a building and refining process. One that allowed him to practice not repeat his sentence and one in which he got progressively better at each time he said it. I also pointed out that at no time had I said his sentence and had him repeat after me. He was capable of doing the work on it himself with some guidance from me.

Or is one of the most. important word in a teacher's vocabulary also seemed to intrigue the group. Rather than explaining it, I again asked one of the participants to tell me what he liked, this time in English. He said he liked chicken. I then asked the whole group to tell me what he had said. Without fail, everyone said, "I like chicken," as I knew they would. I asked them if that was entirely true, and soon a number of people said that it was not. What was true was that "he" (the participant who contributed the sentence) liked chicken. This brought us to the fourth phrase on the list : *Everything the students say must be true.* In the world of the Silent Way, this has nothing to do with the truth of facts per se, it has everything to do with helping the students develop a sense of truth about the language they are using. Specifically, that in order for the language to become the student's own, they should not engage in just saying things that are written in a textbook and that have no sense of reality to them. Thus, in the example of "I like

chicken," having the students practice and repeat that phrase that has only come from one of them and as such may only apply to that student has no place in establishing that sense of truth. Moving back to the original statement about "or," I then had the participants think of another way to say the same thing using different language. Things like, "He likes to eat chicken," "He likes eating chicken," etc. came out. After each example, I would say, "Or ?" to the participants, getting them to come up with more ways to say the same thing using different language. The point of the exercise, I told them was that native speakers have a number of different ways available to them to say the same thing. This is what makes them native speakers and that their students, if they want to become "native-like" speakers have to have the criteria to be able to do the same thing. The fact that students often only learn one way of saying something does not help them on their road to becoming an English speaker.

This discussion led to a brief one on the sixth statement : *Do as much as possible with as little as possible.* Many teachers of English believe that vocabulary development is one of the most important things that students need to be doing in the classroom. The Silent Way encourages teachers to make as much language out of as few words as possible. This will help students develop the criteria they need to rearrange the same words to say similar and sometimes different things. The above is an exercise in just that.

People like to talk about themselves. Students are people, too, moved us in the direction of content in the classroom. The AET's recognized that often the content of the textbook is so far removed from the students' lives that is not easily accessible and often boring for the students. I agreed. The textbook by which I studied French had nothing to do with my life and in class we never talked about anything that was related to what I did. We only spoke about Maurice and Claude. Sometimes I took the role of one and sometimes the other. I used and practiced "their" words *not* mine and the only time I made a mistake was I when had to transform what they said into something else the textbook or teacher told me to do. I also accessed all of this language through my own, i. e., I understood the French through the English provided in the parentheses of the textbook or from the teacher translating the material, much like Japanese students access English here. I proposed to the AET's that if we want the students to make the language their own, we need to have the students start to use it in a real way about real things almost immediately from the beginning of their study of it. One way to do this is after the students have a handle on some of the basics is to have them begin to talk about themselves. This has two advantages, one people generally like to talk about themselves and therefore enjoy doing so, and two, it makes sure that at least one person in the classroom is relating what they are saying to their own life and thus bringing a sense of truth to the language.

This brought us to a discussion of moving away from the textbooks and the problems that this could cause. First, the AET's told me that many JTE's are not ready to move away from using a textbook. Second, that doing this kind of thing takes a lot of time because invariably the students are going to make mistakes. In regard to the first question, I think that one of the reasons the AET's are here is to help JTE's move away from textbooks and into the "real" world of English. For some JTE's however, this can be a very frightening thing and one which needs

to be approached with caution over a period of time. In regard to the second concern, most of the AET's agreed that making mistakes is an important part of language learning, their learning of Japanese in particular. They however, had trouble reconciling that idea with the fifteen minutes of this, fifteen minutes of that and a final fifteen minutes of something else that is the reality of most lesson planning. Most, if not all, lesson planning does not allow time for mistakes. The material must be covered and in as short a time as possible. I suggested that again the type of approach I was advocating be tackled a little at a time and that maybe trying incorporate it into a structured lesson plan might prove to be difficult at first. However, in trying it they might find that students liked this kind of learning and that that would be more incentive to give it more time.

It was here that the problem that some of the the AET's were having with getting students to speak in class came up. I gave them a number of suggestions that I had found to work in my class. One was to just be quiet until someone said something in English. This was quickly dismissed as being impractical and impossible by the AET's in their classes of 40 plus students being team-taught by themselves and the JTE's. They believed that chaos would develop or that the JTE would not be willing to try this. Another suggestion I made which was a little better received was to give everyone in the class a small object, e. g. a one yen coin or a Cuisenaire rod. The students would then be required to say one thing in English, e.g., something that they liked or that they could do, etc. and when they finished saying it and said it correctly, they would be able to put their object into the finished pile. Students still holding the object would then be students not finished. I have found that this works in a reverse type of "positive" peer pressure. Students wanting to be the same as others would have to say something to do so. I have found that at first, this type of gimmick is necessary but as the class continues students do begin to contribute more willingly.

When the topic of correction came up, I brought in the ninth statement, *Don't do the students work for them.* I worked here with some of the correction techniques that a Silent Way teacher might use. For example, asking students to say something again to see if they correct their mistake automatically, giving students general and specific hints about what corrections need to be made, e. g., telling students how many mistakes they have in their sentences, telling them how many extra words they have or are missing, etc. I also showed them a typical style of correction where the teacher uses his or her fingers to indicate how many words there should be or exactly where in the sentence the problem is. In all of these methods, the emphasis is on the student doing the actual correction themselves.

In speaking about correction, a question arose as to why Japanese students make so many mistakes with things that are so basic to English. One of the AET's proposed that before they actually had the basics down pat, the students were rushed on to the next thing in the textbook. This is I believe true. There is still, however, another reason that lies very close to the heart of the problem and it leads us now and the participants then to contemplate the second statement : *Knowing about something and knowing how to do it are two different things.* At the workshop, I gave an example from my own life that exemplifies the truth of this statement. I am a gardener.

When I first started gardening, it was here in Japan. Unfortunately, at that time there was very little literature on the subject available here. Thus, I relied heavily on books published in the UK and the US. Armed with the knowledge that I had "gained" from these books I began to garden in Japan. After the first month, almost everything I had planted was dead. I realized very quickly, that while I knew a lot about gardening from books, I did not know anything about gardening in my backyard. The climate and the soil conditions and what I could grow turned out to be very different from what the books told me I could grow. I learned this the hard way, by lots of trial and error and hard work. Now, I know how to garden here, and I know because my flowers bloom and bloom and bloom. I also know now that because I can actually grow things here, I can adapt what I read to fit my situation and be assured of fairly consistent success. Students in Japan are like the old me. They learn a lot about English, particularly its rules and inconsistencies, but when they try to use it they cannot. They know a lot about English but they often have no idea how to use it.

This lead directly to a discussion of the third and fourth statements : *Give experiences not explanations and Images* and *Experiences lead to retention, memorizing leads to forgetting.* This proved to be a quite short discussion because most of the AET's agreed that these things were pretty much common sense. Most were able to see that what they had memorized for tests in school was almost entirely lost to them. Whereas, the know-hows that they had taught themselves, i. e., they had experienced, were ready at a minutes' notice. Even though many had not ridden a bicycle for some time before they came to Japan, once they tried again they were almost always successful. It was here that I again stressed the importance of saying things that are true for the students and for the situation. I gave an example of something that had happened in my class some time before the workshop. Two students had started to speak at the same time. The situation was perfect for introducing "after you," which I did. Thereafter, whenever that situation arose, students invariably and without hesitation used "after you." They had had a meaningful experience with it that lead to its retention.

The final statement that we spoke about was ironically the first on the list : *Students can talk more if you talk less.* While at first there were a number of questions about whether this was possible in a class of 40 students, I tried to make clear exactly what I meant by this statement. My premise was that teachers should do more listening to what and how the students are saying things. That they should not engage in long explanations because it takes time away from what the students are there to do, use English. Furthermore, that teachers, if they set up situations in the right way, can teach without hardly ever saying a word. The participants were baffled by this so I gave them an example of such a situation. I specifically chose the example of introducing themselves because I knew that all AET's at some point in time (some all the time) have a need to do such a thing in their classroom. I know that many prepare pictures, games and sometimes songs to do so. Many of their self introductions are elaborate performances which the students usually listen to and are then asked questions about to check their comprehension. At the workshop, I showed them another way that they could do the same thing without them ever saying a word.

On a black board, I had posted all of the words that the participants would need to introduce me themselves. The words themselves were in no particular order. I then pointed to words that would make this sentence, "You are Robert Schalkoff and you are from New Jersey in the US." I then made a gesture to one of the participants that indicated he should say something. He said the same thing everyone had said. I shook my head and made a gesture to indicate he should talk about himself, which he did in the same way as he had introduced me. I explained that depending on the class level, we could continue in this way with me pointing things or we could leave it entirely up to the students to put sentences together from the words on the board. Students could be encouraged to talk about themselves immediately after each sentence or they could wait to the end and be given a writing assignment to do a similar activity for themselves. Both of these activities would bring English home to the students and provide lots of room for exploration and mistakes as everyone would have different information to give about themselves. While this example described here would require a fairly good command of the basics of English, it could be scaled down or up to suit almost any situation. It would also make the students the talkers and not the listeners that they usually are.

It was here that the workshop ended and the participants were asked to give feedback on it.

Evaluation

The workshop as evaluated by the participants was deemed to be very successful. Most participants commented on the fact that they were able to work on the list individually, thinking about their particular situation, and as a group, through our discussions. Though some would have liked more specific examples, many spoke of being able to adapt the principles to what they were doing. Many spoke about feeling energized and excited to go back and try some of the things that we had discussed in their own classroom. They also saw real opportunity to go back and share some of the things that we had talked about with the JTE's at their schools. Almost all of the AET's commented on the usefulness of speaking with other AET's about their situations. Some expressed surprise that although they did not think their concerns were included in the list of statements, most of those concerns were addressed by the discussions regarding the list. Some AET's confessed to bringing other things to do in the workshop. However, because they were so interested in what we did, they wound up not doing them and participated. A number of AET's also expressed a desire to have the JTE's experience a similar workshop.

Some criticisms were noted. One AET was very upset about what he/she saw as other AET's complaining about problems that demonstrate their lack of ability to understand the Japanese education system. Another said that maybe I was too idealistic about what could be done in the public schools but that he/she would try some of the ideas regardless. Another said that most things were not applicable to his/her situation but that the discussions were interesting.

On the whole, I found it to be a very stimulating session. I did, however, really feel the need for the participation of JTE's. Talking about team-teaching with only half of the team, while it may be a necessity, is certainly not a desirable one. Conducting a similar workshop with both AET's and JTE's might prove to be difficult because of conflicts that might arise. However, with

proper moderation, I believe such a workshop would promote a more common understanding about what each group expects from the team-teaching experience. This would hopefully lead to better teaching and more importantly better learning.

References

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