Teaching English the Silent Way transcript of commentary for the films for Day 2 session 3

1 Adding the word 'many' (4m 25s)

The students had been working on phrases like ‘there are more than two there’. In this film the teacher, Don Cherry, slightly extended the range of language they were working on to include the word ‘many’.

Notice how he started by making sure the class could say the sentence with good pronunciation and rhythm and only then made sure that the students associated the words with the meaning.

Don didn’t use explanation or translation to make the connection between the situation and the words the students were saying. He wanted the association to be as direct as possible, so he asked them to point to which rods they were referring to as they said the phrase. It is by experiencing enough clear examples of how words correspond to situations that we build up an intuitive sense of how to express ourselves in English.

That is why Don had been gradually building more and more language around similar situations over this and the last few films, and for the same reason, he continued to do so over the next few films too.

2 Contrasting situations (5m 37s)

At the start of this film, one student built on what the class had been working on and created the sentence ‘there are many there and there’, pointing to the relevant piles of Cuisenaire rods.

Notice how the teacher, Don Cherry, introduced a contrasting element to the situation and supplied the word ‘but’. And a little later added a further contrast—how the speaker might feel about the situation: excited, disappointed or neutral.

You'll have noticed how Don got the students to practise describing the situations and how someone might feel about them.

There's more to language than pronunciation, word choice, grammar and intonation. There is also the way we distribute energy throughout the sentence to indicate how we feel: Don wanted his students to start functioning in the way that native speakers do in this respect.

3 'There are a lot there' (7m 14s)

The students had been using phrases like 'more than', 'a few' and 'many' which they needed to describe aspects of situations made with Cuisenaire rods. In this film the teacher, Don Cherry, introduced the phrase 'a lot' and the students came up with the sentence 'There are a lot there'.

The start of this sentence involves some tricky pronunciation details—a native speaker would use the /r/ sound to join the first three words together so that it sounds like this: /ðə rə rə/. Working on phrases like this, as they are actually spoken is important, not only so that the students sound English, but also so they can recognise the phrase in normal speech.

Notice how, even though the /l/ and /r/ sounds are considered difficult for Japanese speakers, the students said these sounds well in this film. This is because rather than giving the students aural models to copy, Don had shown the students the day before what to do with their mouths to make them.

Notice how Don used several techniques to help the students get closer to authentic English pronunciation.

This is an example of how working on pronunciation should be introduced at any point in a lesson whenever it is needed: pronunciation shouldn't be worked on only in a 'pronunciation lesson'.

You'll have noticed how, despite the fact that the work on this pronunciation problem took over 5 minutes, the class hadn't lost the thread and were able to return seamlessly to describing the situation with the rods on the table. This is quite normal. Despite what might seem like a long diversion to work on a phrase or sentence, a class can usually pick up the thread of what they're talking about quite easily.

4 Exploring different varieties of English (3m 16s)

In this film the teacher, Don Cherry, used the word 'lot' to explore the vowel sounds of different versions of English from Chicago, California, England and, by contrast, Japan.

Notice how the students were able to modify how they sounded by changing the shapes they made with their mouths, simply by watching how Don moved his mouth as he mimed.

The fact that they could do this, at will, and without hearing anyone say these versions first, illustrates the power of the articulatory approach that Don has been taking to teaching pronunciation in this course.

This work was further practice for the students in changing and controlling how they use their mouths: the more they can do this, the better they will be able to improve their pronunciation. At the same time the students were getting used to hearing the wide variety of vowel sounds that, unlike other languages, English tolerates.