

Rules, Patterns
and Words by
Dave Willis

Disclaimer

Summary of the Book

Summary

1. Students do not learn the grammar that the teacher presents them with in a straightforward manner
2. Lexis determines the grammar of the sentence, so teaching should focus on word patterns and not just verb tenses
3. The grammar of spoken English is different than written English, and we need to be aware of this in our teaching.

Students do not learn
the grammar that the
teacher presents them
with in a
straightforward manner

Students will not be able to produce a new grammar form in the same lesson it is first presented to them.

From page 7

“There is, then, plenty of evidence that learners do not move immediately from an understanding of new language forms to spontaneous production of those forms.”

Therefore, Dave Willis does not agree with the P-P-P style method.

from page 23

“Most teaching strategies rely on the introduction of new language forms as the most efficient way forward. Because of this they rely on presentation and practice of these forms. But these forms do not seem to be incorporated into the learner’s language in a direct and straightforward way.”

Alternative suggestion p.24-25

Improvisation

Recognition

Rehearsal

System Building

Exploration

Consolidation

Spontaneous Use

Lexis determines the grammar of the sentence, so teaching should focus on word patterns and not just verb tenses

Traditional grammar

Subject + Verb + Object

But

I laughed

Subject + Verb (no object)

She bought a dress.

Subject + Verb+ Object

I will put it away.

Subject + Verb+Object+Adverbial

The choice of lexis actually determines the grammar of the sentence, so students need to be taught lexical patterns, and not just verb tenses.

The grammar of spoken English is different than written English, and we need to be aware of this in our teaching.

Most of the traditional grammar rules come from written English, and doesn't reflect the way people actually talk.

This is because written English is easier to analyze.

But actually, spoken English is much more common in real life.

In spoken English, speakers often just tend to string together words to create meaning.

Example:

His cousin in Beccles, her boyfriend, his parents bought him a Ford Escort for his birthday.

He has a cousin in Beccles whose boyfriend's parents bought him.....

If we only teach students the rules of written English, they will struggle in real life conversational situations.

p.200

It is entirely unreasonable to expect learners to produce written language under the real-time constraints which apply to spoken language.

p.200

It is not unusual for teachers to insist on written forms, even where a short form would be more appropriate. Many teachers have a tendency to insist that students speak in complex sentences with subordinate clauses, even though native speakers rarely produce spoken language like this.

What did I
miss?

Criticisms of the book

TESL Reporter 2005

The only quibble about this book is that it requires more careful editing. Minor editing errors include missing information in the reference list, incorrect page numbers listed in the indexes, and typographical errors in the main text. On the whole, however, readers will find the book professionally stimulating and a number of the exercises and tasks of immediate practical use.

Some guy's website

- Dave Willis says that the passive voice is used to organize a text to make it more reader-friendly, but many publishers actually discourage *any* use of the passive voice
- Some of the sentence patterns Dave Willis is talking about are very high level. Only advanced students need to be worried about them, and even then...

The Lexical Approach: A journey
without maps? Modern English
Teacher, 7, 1998, 7-13
Scott Thornbury

<http://www.scottthornbury.com/articles.html>