

Teaching grammar for all the right reasons

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The problem with rules

“We try to contain the language with rules but the language keeps running away” Andrea Borsato

‘the meanings that we want to express..... are clearly messy: they appear so varied and so dependent on the infinite range of different contexts that it is difficult at first to see how we might impose order on them’ Thompson (2004:7)



Bullokars Booke at large, for the Amendment of Orthographie for English speech: wherein, a most perfect supplie is made, for the wantes and double founde of letters in the olde Orthographie, with Examples for the same, with the easie conference and vse of both Orthographies, to save expences in Bookes for a time, vntill this amendment grow to a generall vse, for the easie, speedie, and perfect reading and writing of English, (the speech not changed, as some vntruly and maliciously, or at the least ignorantlie blowe abroad) by the which amende ment the same Authour hath also framed a ruled Grammar, to be imprinted heereafter, for the same speech, to no small commoditie of the English Nation, not only to come to easie, speedie, and perfect vse of our owne language, but also to their easie, speedie, and readie entrance into the secretes of other Languages, and easie and speedie pathway to all Straungers, to vse our Language, heere tofore very hard vnto them, to no small profite and credite to this our Nation, and stay therevnto in the weightiest causes.

There is also imprinted with this Orthographie a short Pamphlet for all Learners, and a Primer agreeing to the same, and as learners shall go forward therein, other necessarie Bookes shall speedily be provided with the same Orthographie.

Heerevnto are also ioyned written Copies with the same Orthographie.

Giue God the praise, that teacheth alwaies.

When truth trieth, errorr flieth.

Secne and allowed according to order.

*Imprinted at London by
Henrie Denham.*

1580.

'A Brief grammar of English'. William Bullokar (1586)

The problem with rules

‘even as you read this, the English language is changing, morphing, fragmenting and merging (and) no single ‘grammar’ is capable of capturing this dynamism and complexity’ Thornbury (2015:10).

The problem with rules

Pedagogic rules are often abstract, hard to apply or contrary to examples used in genuine communications

Use the past progressive to describe a longer action in progress at a specific time in the past.

Pedagogic rules are often qualified with words like 'usually'

State verbs are not usually used in progressive forms

Rules are usually written as truths even if they're untrue

We transform direct speech to reported speech by back-shifting the verb

A pedagogic grammar rule

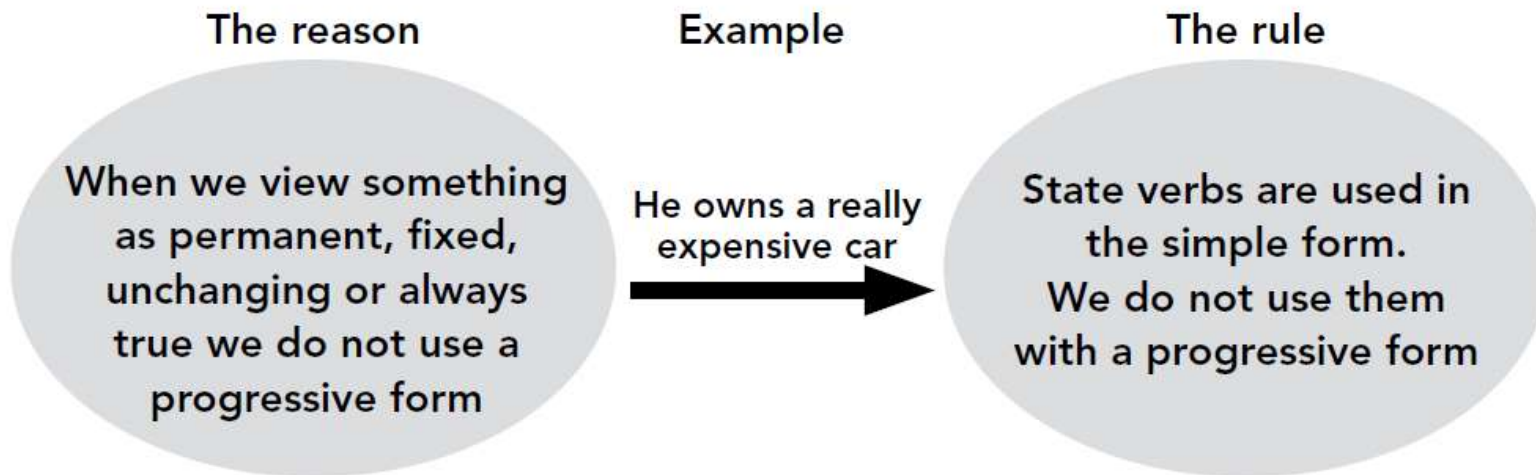
He is owning a really expensive car

The rule

State verbs are used in
the simple form.
We do not use them
with a progressive form

The reason behind the rule

He's owning a really expensive car



The reason behind the rule

I'm loving my job

The reason

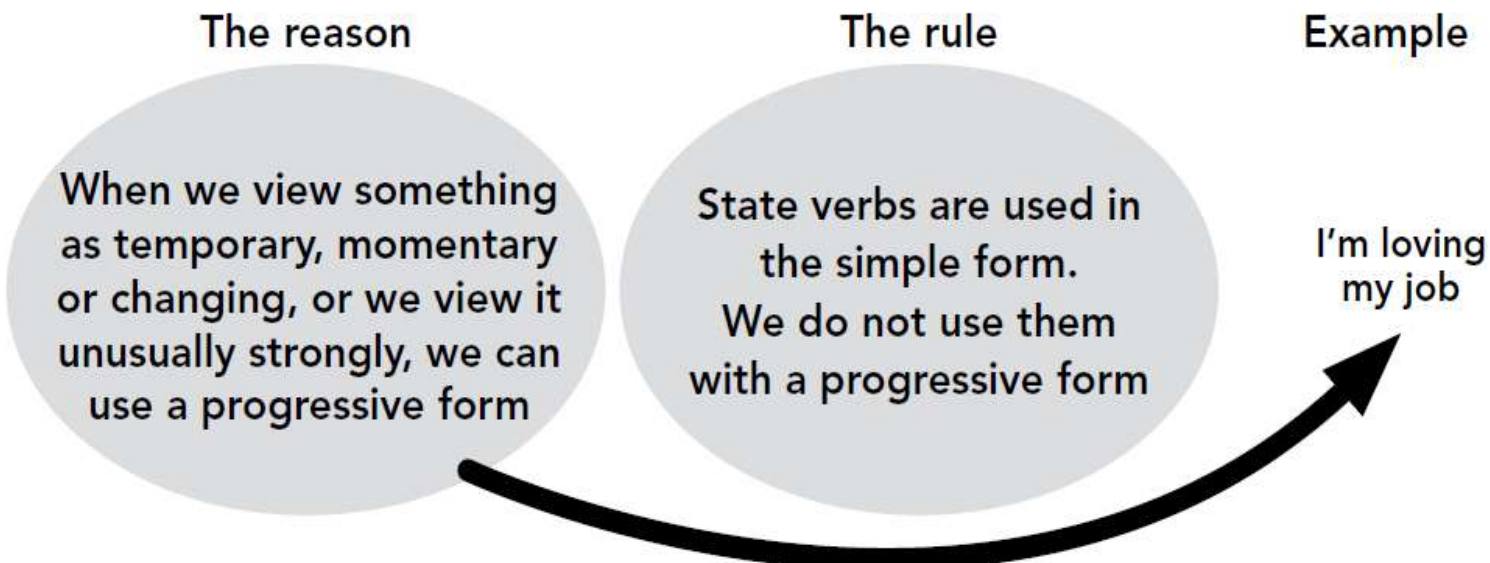
When we view something as temporary, momentary or changing, or we view it unusually strongly, we can use a progressive form

The rule

State verbs are used in the simple form.
We do not use them with a progressive form

Example

I'm loving my job



Exploring reasons, not rules

I know I normally go on about how much I hate working at xxxxx but I'm loving it there at the moment. I don't think they've changed that much and xxxxx is still there but it just feels like we're all pulling in the same direction for a change and no-one's trying to take all the glory. It's like it's a totally different place.

Example

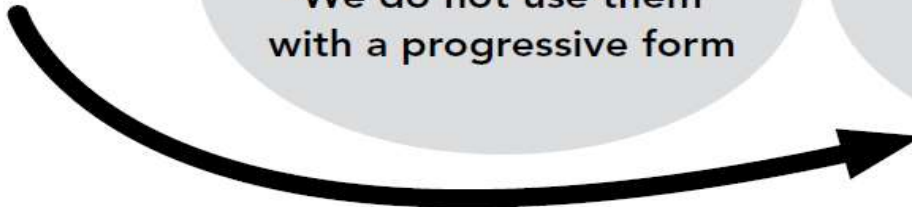
I'm loving
my job

The rule

State verbs are used in
the simple form.
We do not use them
with a progressive form

The reason

The writer is using the
present progressive
because he sees the
situation as unusual. It
isn't normally like this



Exploring reasons, not rules

Ken Robinson: Do schools kill creativity?

I heard a great story recently - I love telling it - of a little girl who was in a drawing lesson. She was six, and she was at the back, drawing, and the teacher said **this girl hardly ever paid attention, and in this drawing lesson, she did**. The teacher was fascinated. She went over to her, and she said, "What are you drawing?"

And the girl said, "I'm drawing a picture of God."

And the teacher said, "But nobody knows what God looks like."

And the girl said, "They will in a minute."

- https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity/transcript?language=en#t-196180

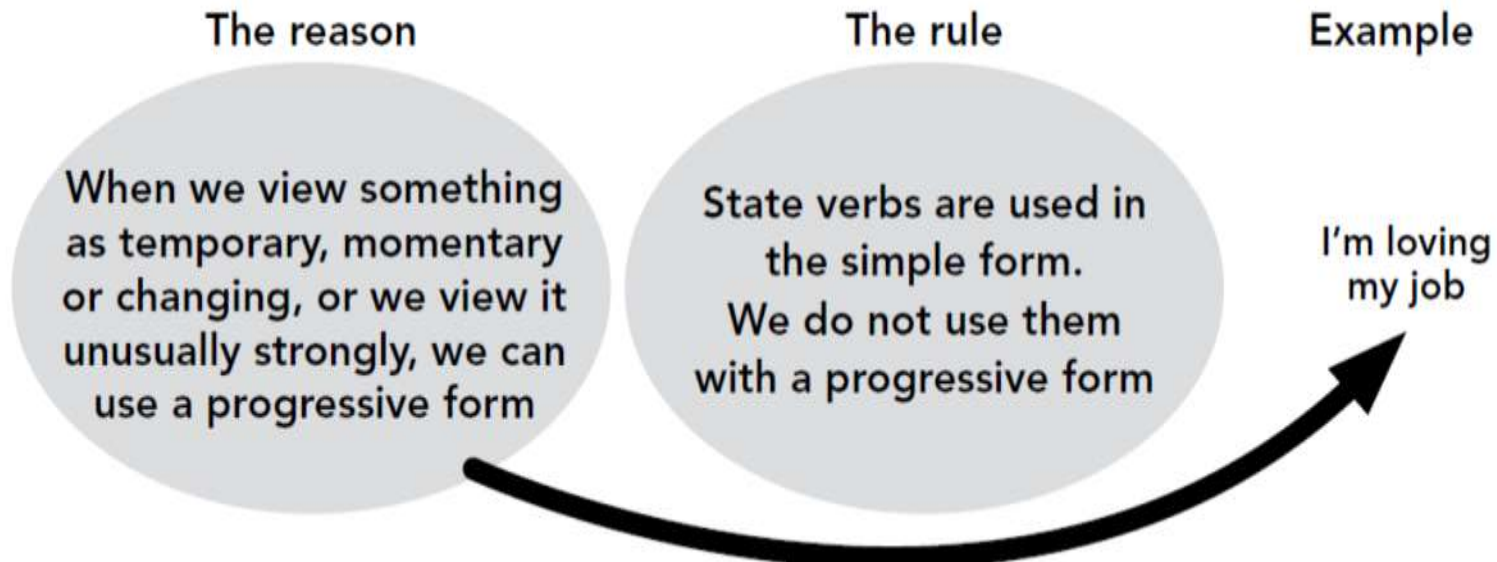
Exploring reasons, not rules

and the teacher said this girl hardly ever paid attention, and in this drawing lesson, she did.

The first is her usual behavior (not good student) and the second is only one time in the story (good student) †

Discovering similarities

“Instead of emphasising a catalogue of different uses, from time to time teachers will need to look for similarity in things which are apparently different” (Lewis 2002: 13)



The grammar of the restaurant review



The grammar of the restaurant review

Why is the writer using the following forms?

- *These come with an amazing mix of flavours and it's beautifully presented too.*
 - *On my last visit I went for the lamb.*
 - *I think I've tried everything on the menu.*

The rules

We use the present simple for habits of things we do regularly, or for things that are generally or always true (unit 1).

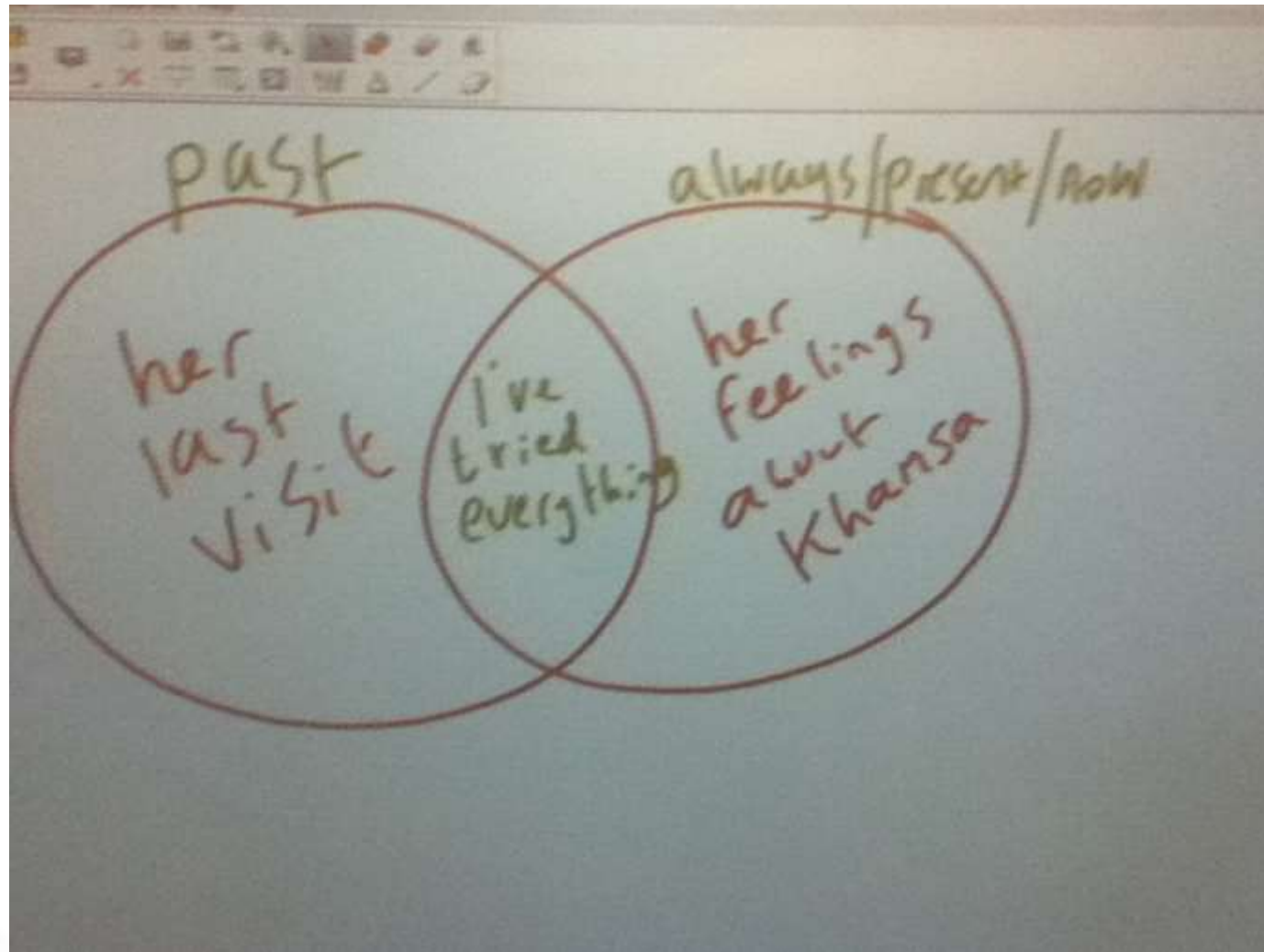
We use the past simple to talk about a finished action or state in the past. It can be something that happened once or many times. We often say when it happened (unit 2).

We use the present perfect to talk about the past and present together. It tells us something about the present (Unit 7)

The students' reasons

- Kathy is using past simple to describe her last visit on Saturday. It's just one visit.
- Kathy is using present simple to describe anyone's visit at any time. If you go now it's the same and if you go in the future it's the same
- Past simple for one visit, present simple for always. Present perfect for all her visits in the past to now

Discovering links and patterns



A replication task

Write your own review and post it on www.London-eating.co.uk



The grammar of the newspaper article



The grammar of the newspaper article

- *The ban was first proposed by Marjorie Simpkins, Mayor of Haversham for the past 32 years.*
- *Terry Halsame, the local librarian, believes that young people will ..*
- *'The Kids who come here don't just sit around all day playing games ...'*

The rules

- Sometimes the relative clause gives us extra information. It is not necessary to tell us which thing / person we are talking about. In this case, commas are used before and after the clause.
- Sometimes the relative clause is necessary to tell us which thing / person we are talking about. In this case, there are no commas.

The students' reasons

- If the writer doesn't say it (the relative clause) the reader doesn't know who some of the people are.
- Take it (the relative clause) out and we're lost for a moment. We don't know who it is.
- The man says it's not all the kids it's only part of the kids in the library ... †

The grammar of the newspaper article

- *The mayor, who has previously called for restrictions on Facebook and Twitter, went on to say that the internet was 'the defining issue of the age'*

The students' reason

- We don't need to know this information but now we know more about her character and history.

A transposition task

‘long before we expect or require our learners to use relative clauses, we can help them to recognise and understand them by systematically drawing their attention to how and why they are used in genuine texts’ Parrott, M. (2010)

Terry Halsame, librarian from Haversham.

You are opposed to any ban on using the internet. You feel that young people are using the library more and more and see many benefits of this. As well as this, you feel the internet is a good learning tool. Before you join the debate, think of two more reasons for opposing the ban.

Exploring reasons, not rules

“It is not the case that the rule exists first and the language must fit it. The truth is that the language exists first and the grammar must describe it. With this in mind, everything a (proficient) speaker produces can be examined and described” (Lewis 2002: 23)

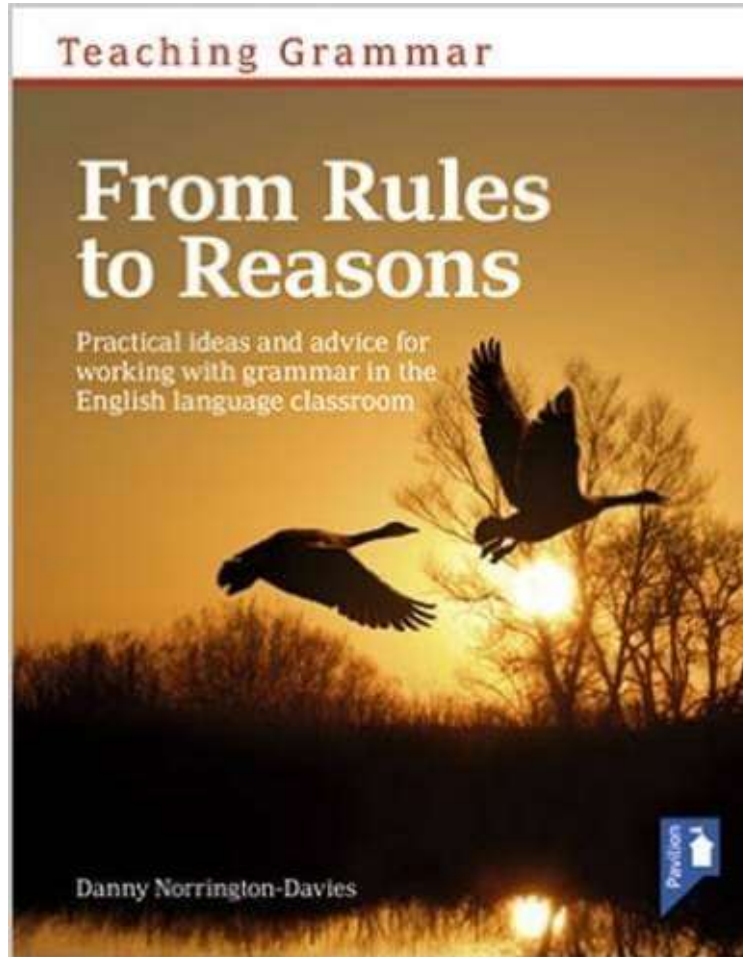
Exploring reasons, not rules

- We can explore what speakers and writers do with language to create meanings
- We can look at how different tenses etc. interact
- We don't have to only use examples that fit the rule
- We can avoid 'sometimes' rules
- We can avoid artificial simplification
- We can avoid statements we know are untrue
- We can explore similarities rather than exceptions
- We give learners ownership of the language

Exploring reasons, not rules

‘Before I never thinking about the why. Why this grammar? I just studied grammar and learnt this grammar is a rule. Just a rule. But after thinking about the why, why this person using *will* or passive, so I start to think about the grammar and maybe I try to make the reason in my mind. It’s difficult but it’s good.’ **Soo, South Korea**

Teaching grammar: from rules to reasons



Teaching grammar for all the right reasons

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<http://thecreativitygroup.weebly.com>

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