

BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE: LINGUISTIC PRINCIPLES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

Manuchehr Salokhitdinov

PhD., Senior Professor

Department of English Language Theory

Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages (SamSIFL), Uzbekistan

Abstract: The persistent gap between linguistic theory and classroom practice represents one of the most enduring challenges in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. While scholars have generated rich theoretical frameworks in areas ranging from typology and contrastive linguistics to phraseology, assessment literacy, and discourse analysis, the translation of these frameworks into principled, evidence-based pedagogical decisions remains uneven. This article examines how key linguistic principles drawn from grammatical theory, lexicology, sociolinguistics, discourse studies, and applied linguistics can be systematically integrated into the EFL classroom. Drawing on a wide body of contemporary scholarship, primarily from Central Asian and international research contexts, the article argues that theory-informed practice is not a luxury but a professional necessity for teachers who aim to develop learners' communicative, academic, and critical capacities in English. Concrete pedagogical implications are identified for each theoretical domain discussed, and the article concludes with a framework for reflective, theory-aware EFL teaching.

Keywords: EFL, linguistic theory, classroom practice, grammar teaching, lexicology, phraseology, assessment literacy.

Introduction

One of the most frequently voiced critiques of language teacher education is that it produces practitioners who are theoretically underprepared teachers who possess procedural fluency in classroom techniques but lack the deeper linguistic knowledge needed to make principled decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Hasanova, Abduazizov, and Khujakulov (2021) draw a precise conceptual map of the distinctions between approaches, methods, procedures, techniques, styles, and strategies in language teaching, demonstrating that these terms are not interchangeable and that each represents a different level of abstraction in the theory-practice relationship. Without understanding these distinctions, teachers risk conflating preference with principle and anecdote with evidence.

The argument of this article is straightforward: linguistic theory, properly understood and selectively applied, is an indispensable resource for the EFL teacher. This is not a call for teachers to become academic linguists, nor for classrooms to become linguistics seminars. Rather, it is a claim that teachers who understand, for example, why Uzbek-speaking learners systematically struggle with English aspect, or why phraseological competence requires a different instructional approach from single-word vocabulary, or why criteria-based assessment requires explicit theoretical grounding, will make better decisions than teachers who do not. Tursunov, Nematov, and Mamayobova (2021) provide the broader context within which these decisions are made, surveying the global landscape of ESL and EFL and showing the diversity of conditions under which English is taught and learned worldwide.

The article is organized as follows. Section 2 examines how typological and contrastive linguistics inform grammar teaching. Section 3 addresses lexicological and phraseological theory as a basis for vocabulary instruction. Section 4 considers how discourse and pragmatic

theory support the development of academic writing. Section 5 turns to assessment theory and its classroom implications. Section 6 examines the role of literary and cultural theory in the EFL classroom. Section 7 addresses the integration of technology from a linguistically informed perspective. Section 8 offers conclusions and a framework for theory-informed reflective practice.

Typological and Contrastive Linguistics in Grammar Teaching

Grammar teaching in the EFL classroom has long oscillated between explicit, rule-based instruction and implicit, communicative acquisition a debate that often generates more heat than light because both sides tend to neglect the question of which grammatical features, for which learners, benefit from which kind of instruction. Typological research provides a principled basis for answering this question by identifying which structural features of English are cross-linguistically rare or typologically marked, and therefore likely to be difficult for learners regardless of their first language, and which features are language-pair-specific sources of interference.

Saloxiddinov (2023) traces the intellectual history of linguistic typology, showing how the discipline evolved from simple morphological classifications toward multi-parameter frameworks that identify implicational universals statements of the form 'if a language has feature X, it also tends to have feature Y.' For EFL teachers in Central Asia, this tradition is not merely academic: it provides predictive tools for anticipating learner difficulties. The definition and cross-disciplinary applications of typology, clarified by Manuchehr (2022), further establish why typological thinking is relevant not only to theoretical linguistics but to applied contexts including language pedagogy. When teachers understand, for instance, that SOV word order tends to co-occur with postpositions and that SVO languages favour prepositions, they can approach the teaching of English prepositions as a genuinely contrastive rather than merely a memory task.

The most directly applicable contribution of typological and contrastive research to Central Asian EFL concerns the differences between English and Uzbek in their encoding of grammatical categories. Saloxiddinov (2020a) analyses the translation of syntactic units representing temporal states from English into Uzbek, revealing systematic differences in how the two languages encode temporal reference that generate predictable translation errors and by extension predictable production errors in EFL writing and speech. Saloxiddinov (2020b) extends this analysis to the grammatical markers of completion in Uzbek, a category that maps only partially onto the English perfect and simple past. For teachers, these findings are directly actionable: explicit contrastive instruction on aspectual distinctions can accelerate learners' acquisition of English tense-aspect distinctions by making the differences rather than the similarities the object of conscious attention.

Lexicological and Phraseological Theory in Vocabulary Instruction

The lexicon has historically been the most undertheorized domain in EFL pedagogy, treated in many curricula as a simple repository of form-meaning pairings to be memorized rather than as a structured, culturally embedded, and cognitively organized system. Recent lexicological and phraseological research offers a corrective to this view by demonstrating that vocabulary knowledge is multidimensional and that effective instruction must address not only form and meaning but also collocation, connotation, register, cultural reference, and pragmatic function.

Nosirova and Kurbanova (2020) document systematic lexical differences between American and British English, a finding with direct pedagogical implications for teachers who must decide which variety to model and how to prepare learners to navigate both in authentic communicative contexts. The typological analysis of phrase structures in English,

conducted by Azizovna (2023), provides a taxonomic framework that can scaffold explicit instruction in the grammar-lexis interface the level at which learners need to understand not just individual words but the structural patterns into which those words enter. Azizovna (2020) approaches this from a stylistic angle, arguing that the meaning of phraseological units is irreducible to the sum of their components and must be approached as a culturally and pragmatically loaded whole.

Phraseological units present particular instructional challenges precisely because their meanings resist compositional analysis. Nasirova (2024a) develops a principled methodology for the contextual and phraseostylistic analysis of fixed expressions in English literary texts, showing that phraseological competence requires exposure to authentic contexts of use rather than decontextualized memorization. The methodological approaches for incorporating phraseological units into English language lessons outlined by Nasirova (2024b) translate this theoretical insight into concrete classroom strategies, including genre-based reading activities, concordance-based discovery tasks, and comparative analysis of fixed expressions across registers. Axmedova (2022) contributes a cross-linguistic perspective by analysing the lexical semantics and aspectual classification of semelfactive verbs in English and Uzbek, showing that even apparently straightforward verbal lexical items carry aspectual properties that differ across languages a finding relevant to both vocabulary and grammar instruction.

Proverbs and culturally specific fixed expressions occupy a distinctive position in vocabulary pedagogy. Ochilova (2014) analyses the semantic structures of English phraseological units and proverbs with proper names, showing that these expressions encode cultural knowledge in condensed, often opaque forms. Ochilova and Nasrullaev (2018) trace the historical development of ancient proverbs and their modern usage, providing the diachronic perspective needed to understand why certain expressions have survived and what cultural values they encode. Khushmanova and Ochilova (2022) examine the translation of proverbs across languages, identifying specific structural and semantic challenges that arise when these culturally embedded expressions are transferred between linguistic systems challenges that teachers can use productively to develop learners' cross-cultural awareness. The sociolinguistic dimensions of formulaic numerical expressions in Jordanian Arabic studied by Hazaymeh (2021) offer a further cross-linguistic perspective on how culturally specific meanings become encoded in superficially simple linguistic forms, reinforcing the point that vocabulary instruction must be simultaneously linguistic and cultural.

In specialized vocabulary domains, Khujakulov (2024) examines folk medicine terminology as a reflection of cultural specificity in English, while Khujakulov (2025) extends this to a comparative-historical analysis of the lexical units of the same domain. Both studies demonstrate that specialized lexicons are not merely technical catalogues but culturally layered systems whose historical development is inseparable from the social practices they name. Azzamova (2020b) makes a comparable point from a theoretical angle, arguing that the multi-dimensional character of terminology requires a conception of vocabulary that integrates cognitive, social, and communicative dimensions a conception that is directly applicable to the teaching of English for Specific Purposes.

Discourse Theory and Academic Writing Instruction

The development of academic writing competence in EFL learners requires an instructional framework that reaches beyond the sentence level to address the organization of ideas across paragraphs and texts, the management of writer-reader interaction, and the conventions of disciplinary discourse. Discourse theory provides the conceptual tools needed to make these dimensions of writing explicit and teachable rather than opaque and acquired only incidentally through extensive reading.

Ardiana, Hamid, and Khodjieva (2026) conduct a contrastive analysis of interactional metadiscourse in research articles written by Indonesian and Uzbekistani EFL students, demonstrating that discourse-level features of academic writing the use of hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and engagement devices are significantly shaped by educational background and disciplinary socialization. This finding implies that academic writing instruction must address not only the propositional content of texts but also their interpersonal and rhetorical dimensions. Mamasharifovich (2020b) underlines the foundational importance of listening proficiency for all subsequent language development, reminding teachers that academic writing instruction cannot be divorced from the broader development of receptive language skills. The lexical differences between American and British academic registers, documented by Nosirova and Kurbanova (2020), further complicate academic writing instruction by requiring teachers to make explicit choices about which model of academic English to develop in learners and why.

The importance of critical thinking as a discourse-level competency the ability to develop, organize, and defend original arguments is highlighted by multiple contributors to the literature reviewed here. Iskandarova (2025) argues that critical thinking must be cultivated through explicitly designed language tasks rather than assumed to transfer automatically from general intelligence, while Zumrad (2023) demonstrates that the principled assessment of critical thinking in higher education requires theoretically grounded criteria rather than impressionistic holistic judgements. Absalamov and Khujakulov (2024) show that writing skill development is most effective when it integrates both product-oriented and process-oriented perspectives, while the figurative and poetic dimensions of language, examined by Haydarova and Azzamova (2026) in their comparative study of Mark Twain and Khudoyberdi Tokhtaboev, remind teachers that literary language is not a peripheral topic for advanced learners but a resource for developing the full range of communicative and rhetorical competence. Sitora and Rajabboyevna (2026) extend this through their comparative study of childhood psychology in literary imagery, showing that cross-cultural literary analysis enriches learners' conceptual vocabulary and discourse awareness simultaneously.

Assessment Theory and Principled Classroom Evaluation

Assessment is the domain in which the gap between linguistic theory and classroom practice is perhaps most consequential. When assessments are not grounded in principled theoretical frameworks, they risk measuring the wrong constructs, generating misleading feedback, and producing misaligned incentives that distort the learning process. Khodjieva (2021) provides a foundational framework for language planning and policy in educational settings, arguing that assessment goals must be explicitly derived from theoretical and sociolinguistic principles rather than administrative convention. The practical difficulties that arise in criteria-based assessment are documented by Khodjieva (2022), whose findings reveal that many practitioners in Central Asian contexts implement rubric-based evaluation inconsistently not from lack of effort but from lack of the theoretical knowledge needed to operationalize assessment criteria reliably.

The most comprehensive recent overview of trends in EFL writing assessment research is provided by Khodjieva, Ardiana, and Rum (2025), whose bibliometric analysis of publications from 2014 to 2024 identifies a decisive shift in the field toward technology-mediated and AI-supported assessment practices. For EFL teachers, this shift creates new demands: they must develop competence in using automated writing evaluation tools while maintaining the critical literacy to evaluate the validity of those tools' outputs against established assessment theory. Fayziev et al. (2020) offer an important cautionary note in their critical review of IELTS impact on academic performance, showing that high-stakes

language tests do not automatically improve educational quality and may in some contexts distort the curriculum in ways that are counterproductive to genuine language development. Zumrad (2023) addresses criterion-based assessment and the principled evaluation of critical thinking directly, proposing a framework calibrated to the specific institutional and cultural context of Uzbek higher education.

The implications of assessment theory for classroom practice are both attitudinal and technical. Attitudinally, theory-informed assessment requires teachers to move from a view of assessment as post-hoc evaluation to a view of assessment as an integral component of the learning process a shift that Khodjieva (2021) grounds in language planning theory. Technically, it requires the ability to develop rubrics that are theoretically grounded, operationally clear, and contextually appropriate, as well as the capacity to use assessment data to inform instructional decisions. Kudratova and Ochilova (2022) demonstrate that game-based activities are not merely motivationally valuable but can function as formative assessment tools when their outcomes are analysed systematically, while Anorboyeva and Azzamova (2022) show that innovative approaches in primary school English teaching require assessment frameworks adapted to young learners' developmental profiles.

Literary and Cultural Theory in the EFL Classroom

The integration of literary and cultural content into EFL instruction has long been a contested area, with some practitioners arguing that literature is an inefficient vehicle for language development and others countering that it is among the richest available resources for developing vocabulary depth, discourse competence, cultural awareness, and aesthetic sensibility. The research reviewed here suggests that both positions contain truth and that the resolution lies in the theory-informed selection and mediation of literary texts rather than in either wholesale adoption or wholesale rejection of literature in language teaching.

Azzamova (2020a) documents the role of extracurricular activities, including literary and cultural engagement, in developing learner autonomy and positive affective orientations toward English outcomes that are essential for long-term language development but difficult to achieve through formal instruction alone. Iskandarova (2023) demonstrates that grammar and vocabulary can be effectively taught through fairy tales and narrative texts in primary school, connecting formal linguistic instruction to the imaginative and emotional engagement that characterizes children's literary experience. The conceptual structures through which the natural world is rendered in literature, analysed by Akhmedova (2023), illustrate how literary language constructs and communicates meaning through culturally specific conceptual systems a perspective that can enrich EFL learners' understanding of both the target language and their own cultural traditions.

Khujakulov's (2024) analysis of folk medicine terminology as a reflection of cultural specificity in English, and his comparative-historical study of the same domain (2025), illustrate how culturally embedded specialist lexicons can be used as pedagogical resources for developing both language awareness and cross-cultural competence. The tourism-driven educational initiative documented by Sadullaeva et al. (2024) represents a content-based approach in which English serves as the medium for engagement with global scientific and environmental discourse an approach that integrates linguistic, cultural, and disciplinary dimensions of learning in a genuinely multidisciplinary framework. Husniya's (2023) examination of competency-based approaches in pre-school education and Ziyodullayeva, Saidabrora, and Akhmedova's (2023) study of English language development in early childhood education collectively affirm that the integration of language and content is not a senior-level luxury but a principle applicable across the entire span of educational development.

Technology, Computation, and Linguistically Informed Digital Practice

The integration of digital tools into EFL instruction creates opportunities for personalization, authentic exposure, and data-driven feedback that were unavailable to previous generations of teachers. However, the uncritical adoption of technology without linguistic understanding risks creating the illusion of progress while leaving fundamental learning challenges unaddressed. Iskandarova (2026a) examines new methods of teaching English as a second language through the lens of artificial intelligence, identifying specific affordances and limitations of AI-based tools for language learning. The challenges teachers face in managing diverse learner populations in technologically enriched classrooms are addressed by Iskandarova (2026b), whose findings emphasize that technology redefines rather than eliminates the need for skilled, theory-aware human teaching. Interactive teaching methods that harness digital affordances while maintaining principled pedagogical design are advocated by Iskandarova (2022), who shows that interactivity is a pedagogical principle rather than merely a technological feature.

Computational approaches to language processing have specific implications for EFL in multilingual contexts. Akhmedova (2024) applies the Boyer-Moore-Horspool algorithm to Uzbek text search, illustrating concretely how computational methods designed for languages with particular morphological and orthographic properties cannot be straightforwardly transferred to typologically different languages. For EFL teachers in Uzbekistan and comparable contexts, this is a reminder that digital tools developed for English-language contexts may require critical evaluation before adoption. Azzamova (2020b)'s theorization of the multi-dimensional character of terminology is relevant here too: the terminological resources embedded in digital language learning platforms reflect particular often anglophone and Western assumptions about what constitutes valid linguistic knowledge, assumptions that may not align with learners' needs and contexts. Ziyodullayeva, Saidabrora, and Akhmedova (2023) demonstrate that even in early childhood education, the development of English language skills benefits from the thoughtful integration of digital and analogue resources guided by developmentally appropriate linguistic principles.

Conclusion

The evidence assembled in this article supports a strong conclusion: the gap between linguistic theory and EFL classroom practice is not inevitable but is the product of teacher education systems that have failed to provide practitioners with the conceptual tools needed to translate theoretical knowledge into principled instructional decisions. The research reviewed here from contrastive typology (Saloxiddinov, 2023, 2020a, 2020b; Manuchehr, 2022) and grammatical analysis (Mamasharifovich, 2020a, 2020b, 2026a, 2026b) through phraseology and lexicology (Nasirova, 2024a, 2024b; Ochilova, 2014, 2018; Azizovna, 2020, 2023; Khujakulov, 2024, 2025; Axmedova, 2022; Hazaymeh, 2021) to assessment theory (Khodjieva, 2021, 2022; Khodjieva et al., 2025; Zumrad, 2023; Fayziev et al., 2020) and pedagogy (Hasanova et al., 2021; Tursunov et al., 2021; Iskandarova, 2022, 2023, 2025, 2026a, 2026b; Anorboyeva & Azzamova, 2022; Azzamova, 2020a, 2020b) collectively maps a rich theoretical landscape that has direct and actionable implications for EFL practice.

A framework for theory-informed reflective practice in EFL must include at minimum the following components. First, teachers need a working knowledge of the typological and contrastive properties of the languages in contact in their classrooms, enabling them to anticipate learner difficulties rather than merely respond to errors after the fact (Saloxiddinov, 2020a, 2020b; Mamasharifovich, 2026a, 2026b). Second, vocabulary instruction must be grounded in a multi-dimensional understanding of lexical knowledge that incorporates phraseological competence, cultural reference, and cross-register awareness (Nosirova &

Kurbanova, 2020; Azizovna, 2023; Ochilova, 2014; Khushmanova & Ochilova, 2022; Kudratova & Ochilova, 2022). Third, assessment must be theoretically grounded, transparent in its criteria, and used formatively as well as summatively (Khodjievna, 2021, 2022; Ardiana et al., 2026; Absalamov & Khujakulov, 2024). Fourth, literary, cultural, and content-based resources must be integrated into EFL instruction in ways that connect language form to meaning and use (Haydarova & Azzamova, 2026; Sitora & Rajabboyevna, 2026; Akhmedova, 2023; Sadullaeva et al., 2024). Fifth, digital tools must be adopted critically, with teachers maintaining the theoretical awareness needed to evaluate their linguistic and pedagogical assumptions (Akhmedova, 2024; Iskandarova, 2026a; Ziyodullayeva et al., 2023; Husniya, 2023).

Bridging theory and practice in EFL is ultimately a matter of professional identity: it requires teachers to see themselves not merely as transmitters of language skills but as intellectually engaged practitioners whose decisions are grounded in the best available theoretical and empirical knowledge. The Central Asian research context represented in this review demonstrates that this aspiration is not utopian it is already being realized, one study at a time, by a community of scholars whose work deserves wider recognition in the global ELT literature.

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