MA TESL Comprehensive Exam – August 2010

Section I: Foundations and Methods (2 parts — Answer both questions)

1. In discussions of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, we often hear about the role of the topics listed below in skill development, classroom instruction, materials development, and assessment.

(a) fluency and accuracy
(b) skill and subskills
(c) pre-during-post activities
(d) strategies and strategy training
(e) structured-guided-free activities
(f) learner centered vs. teacher centered instruction
(g) the role of grammar instruction
(h) the role of vocabulary instruction
(i) explicit and implicit correction
(j) pair-work, group-work, and whole-class work

Choose TWO skills (reading, writing, speaking, or listening). Demonstrate your understanding of EACH skill by discussing it in terms of FOUR of the 10 topics listed above (a-j). Define terms in sufficient detail to show your understanding of them in relation to the target skill, and explain their role in instruction and materials development. In cases where two or more terms are juxtaposed (e.g., fluency and accuracy), be sure to make a distinction between the two terms and explain their relevance to skill development. Refer to relevant literature, where appropriate, to strengthen your response.

2. Teaching methods and approaches often reflect the dominant paradigms of how people learn and how to best teach languages. Select TWO of the following teaching approaches or methods listed below:

- Audio Lingual Method
- Total Physical Response
- Silent Way
- Task-based language teaching
- Form focused instruction
- Communicative language teaching
- Content-based instruction

In a clearly written response about the two teaching approaches you have chosen, provide the following:

(a) describe the selected approaches including the principles and goals of the approaches and any teaching or learning theories that are linked to the approaches;
(b) name one or more proponents of the approaches; and
(e) discuss any limitations of the approaches in terms of language skill/ability development.
Refer to relevant literature when appropriate to support your response.
Section II: Curriculum and Program Administration (2 parts — Answer both questions)

1. Imagine that you have just been hired for a language program position with both teaching and administrative responsibilities. As part of your administrative duties, you'll be chairing two important committees: A) the ESL Resource Center Committee and B) the Faculty Professional Development Committee. For both committees, you anticipate some of these typical administrative activities:

- Planning and running committee meetings
- Delegating responsibilities
- Inspiring innovation among committee members
- Empowering committee members
- Making decisions and negotiating
- Managing your time (and the time of the committees)

From this bulleted list, choose the THREE (3) administrative activities that you think will prove most challenging for you in your capacity as Chair of both committees. For each activity, explain (a) its importance from an administrative and program-wide perspective, (b) the challenges that you anticipate, and (c) possible actions that you can take to turn the administrative challenges into positive opportunities for program and faculty growth. Refer to the literature to support your ideas.

Include a brief opening paragraph that identifies the three administrative activities that you plan to discuss. In your closing paragraph, provide a summation statement.

2. The curriculum development and renewal process involves multiple steps, including (a) needs and situation analyses, (b) specification of goals and objectives, (c) determination and specification of the most appropriate syllabus frameworks, (d) designation of course content, (e) development of syllabi, and (e) formulation of ongoing evaluation strategies.

Consider the issues associated with just one step in the process, specifically the step in which curriculum developers determine and specify the most appropriate syllabus frameworks for a given instructional setting (c above). As part of your response, identify the following:

(a) the place of this step in the overall curriculum development process (as part of your brief introduction)

(b) the issues to be considered
(a) the questions that must be raised to come to a decision
(b) the approaches and syllabus types, and their distinguishing features, that represent viable options in a variety of settings

Refer to the literature to support your response.
Section III: Sociolinguistics (2 parts — Answer both questions)

1. Describe three (3) socially determined varieties that have been analyzed in sociolinguistics. For each type, summarize two investigations treating that type of variation, referring to researchers (by last name and date) who have studied this variety. Include discussion of the external (i.e., non-linguistic) characteristics associated with the variety as well as the typical linguistic characteristics. For each variety, give one or two specific examples of associated linguistic characteristics.

Example: for geographic dialect: Kurath (1949) on geographic dialects of the Eastern United States, includes non-linguistic characteristics such as place of residence; and linguistic characteristics such as different pronunciations or different words. An example comes from the word for ‘dragonfly,’ which is darning needle in New York but snake feeder in the Pennsylvania.
(Note: do NOT use this example in your response.)

2. Examine the following excerpt of interactional discourse, which takes place between an elderly patient (P) and two nurses, AN and TN. Analyze the conversational features observed and relate them to the register reflected in the excerpt, identifying three of the features of that register and mentioning functional reasons for those features.

Then compare and contrast them with features found in the conversational register described in Tannen’s Thanksgiving Dinner study or in any other sociolinguistic research you know of that describes the conversational register. Refer to the literature as appropriate.

Setting: P is being washed and dried after a bath

( ) = whispered utterances

1. P: I’m cold
2. AN: you’re cold?( ) it’s like a sauna in here
3. P: [coughs] I’m cold nurse
4. AN well we’ll have your jacket on now hang on a minute
5. P: I’m cold nurse
6. TN: shouldn’t be
7. AN: it’s warm up here Albert
8. P: (it’s cold though nurse)
9. AN: ((it’s not)) it’s warm
10. P I’m cold anyway
11. AN: are you?
12. TN: soon have you in bed OK?
Section IV: Grammar (2 parts — answer both questions)

1. Identify the options for relativizers in English (relative pronouns and relative adverbs), and discuss the factors that influence the choice among relativizers (including grammatical, semantic, register, and discourse factors).

2. Analyze the following sentences using the diagramming system that you are most familiar with. In your diagrams, label the forms, grammatical functions, and word classes of all words and constituents in each sentence.

   a) This doesn’t look bad compared to the baby poop color that they had picked out.
   b) Another thing you’re going to have to do is enter all those notes.
   c) Because of the risk of asbestos-based products, these are now being replaced by fibre cement products.
   d) Insects may just shut down the sensitivity of their eyes in a way that’s roughly comparable to our closing our eyelids.
   e) He was busy talking about his belief that plays should carry a moral message to their audiences.
Section V: Second Language Acquisition (2 parts — answer both questions)

1. According to two SLA theories, what role does noticing play in second language learning? Through reference to theoretical and empirical research, answer this question by comparing/contrasting how TWO different theoretical perspectives in SLA account for noticing in L2 learning.

2. What methods do researchers working within the sociolinguistic approach use to test their claims about SLA? Through reference to theoretical and empirical research, answer this question by DESCRIBING and EVALUATING the research designs, operationalizations, data collection and analysis typically used within the sociolinguistic approach to SLA.