MA TESL Comprehensive Exam – January 2010

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

1. In discussions of second language acquisition and language teaching, the issues listed below are often mentioned:

   (1) Affective factors  (4) Interaction/modified interaction
   (2) Developmental sequences  (5) Learning styles
   (3) Input/Intake/Output  (6) Motivation

Select THREE of these issues. For EACH one, (a) provide a definition that reveals its complexity; (b) explain its significance to the language classroom; AND (c) consider implications for classroom instruction. Refer to relevant literature when appropriate.

2. Language methodologists often praise the pre-during-post framework for the teaching of language skills. Choose TWO of the following language skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening). For EACH skill selected, explain (a) the benefits of adopting a pre-during-post lesson framework, (b) the goals most often associated with each lesson stage, and (c) the aspects of the skill being addressed to demonstrate your understanding of the skill. In your explanation of each skill, describe two typical classroom activities that can be used at each stage of the pre-during-post framework. Explain how these activities complement the goals stated earlier. Refer to relevant literature when appropriate.

Section II: Curriculum and Program Administration (2 parts — Answer both questions)

1. Imagine that you are working in a language program that is open to curricular innovations (e.g., a university-based intensive English program, a community college ESL program, an international school with EFL courses for grades 8-12 students, an adult education program). You have spoken casually with the program director about a new course for intermediate-level L2 students that is reflective of state-of-the-art practices in the field. The director of the language program is supportive of your ideas, but is uncertain of your capabilities to actually develop the course from scratch.
Write a memo to the director providing a thorough explanation of the steps that you will take to (a) plan the new course, (b) pilot it, and then (c) evaluate it. At this point, the director is not at all concerned about the details of the course, but rather with the details of the course-development process. Provide enough detail to persuade the director of your understanding of the complexities of the course development process and your ability to handle them. Refer to relevant literature where appropriate.

[Toward the beginning of your memo, please make reference to the type of program/students the course is being proposed for.]

2. Language program administration can be quite complex, whether the language program being administered is small or large. In an opening statement, explain the broad scope of a language program administrator’s job. Then identify what you perceive to be the FOUR most important roles a language program administrator plays. For each role, describe the multi-dimensionality of the role, possible challenges, and realistic solutions. Refer to the literature to strengthen your response.

Section III: Sociolinguistics (2 parts — Answer both questions)

1. Sociolinguistics involves the study of language in context. Select a particular speech act (apologies, greetings, requests, etc.) and describe how that speech act differs between two languages/cultures and how these differences can result in miscommunication. Be sure to cite relevant literature when appropriate.

2. Literacy is central to many aspects of sociolinguistics. Discuss the differing kinds of literacy practices found in home contexts across social groups. Then describe how the early literacy experiences of children at home can influence their later success in school, giving specific examples. Refer to relevant research on home and school literacy practices.

Section IV: Grammar (2 parts — Answer both questions)

1. Verbs can be grouped into verb types, or ‘valencies’ (e.g., intransitive, monotransitive). The valency type specifies the clause elements or phrase types that occur with a verb. In many cases, a single verb can occur with different valencies in different clauses. Identify the possible valency types of verbs in English, list the defining criteria for each valency, and identify and illustrate specific verbs that can function as multiple types. Finally, identify and illustrate the different valency types that can occur with complement clauses.
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.

1. I'm realizing that this whole thing is moving up and down and I'm thinking I don't want to be on it.
2. I thought it might be something that we might want to talk about.
3. I went to Eddie's house to get back my wool plaid shirt.
4. Jones said he had asked for permission to see the flight deck.
5. Conversely, Melotti, in citing Marx's assertion that the state is the organ of class rule, rejects the notion that Asiatic society is not a true class society.

Section V: Second Language Acquisition (2 parts — answer both questions)
1. According to two SLA theories, what role does negative feedback 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 negative feedback in L2 learning.

2. What methods do researchers working within the universal grammar 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 methods typically used within the universal grammar approach to SLA.