MA-TESL Comprehensive Exam for January 2011

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

1. In discussions of second language acquisition and language teaching, the concepts/factors/variables listed below are often mentioned:
   
   - Attention/noticing
   - Fossilization
   - Communicative competence
   - Developmental sequences
   - Interlanguage
   - L1 influence (interference/transfer)
   - Affective factors
   - Interaction

   Select three (3) of these eight concepts. For each one selected, (a) provide a definition that reveals its complexity; (b) explain its significance and implications for the language classroom; and (c) cite at least one researcher who has worked on this concept. Be sure to include a very brief introduction that identifies the concepts that you plan to discuss to orient your readers. Refer to other relevant literature when appropriate.

2. English language teaching professionals often promote the use of a pre-, during-, and post-instructional format to enhance skills instruction and mastery.

   a. Explain, in general terms, the benefits of a pre-, during-, and post-instructional format, and how this instructional format can assist students in mastering language skills.

   b. Then choose TWO of the following skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening). For each skill, explain how skill development can be achieved through pre-, during-, and post-activities. Be sure to (1) explain the learning goals often associated with each lesson stage (pre, during, post), and (2) provide at least one concrete example of skill-specific activities at each point in the lesson (pre, during, post).

   Refer to relevant literature, where appropriate, to strengthen your claims.
Section II: Curriculum and Program Administration (2 parts — Answer both questions)

1. Consider the case of new course development. What are the steps that course designers should take to convert a good idea for a new course to actual course implementation? Describe the process in detail, starting with early information gathering and continuing through the piloting phase. Describe each step in detail, referring to relevant literature to strengthen your claims.

2. Imagine that you are a language program administrator. You have just returned from an interesting three-week trip during which you have visited several other language programs to gather ideas for improving your program. You have decided that you want to (a) inspire innovation among faculty, (b) reinvigorate burnt out faculty, (c) initiate strategic planning, (d) become a better advocate of students and faculty, (e) improve perceptions of the academic legitimacy of your program, and (f) improve outreach with other campus and community entities.

Select FOUR of these areas (a-f) for immediate attention. Provide a rationale for your decision to pursue each area, and then describe the steps that you might take to bring about each of these programmatic changes. Refer to relevant literature when applicable.
Section III: Sociolinguistics (2 parts — Answer both questions)

1. In a well-developed response, provide at least three reasons why knowledge of sociolinguistics is relevant to second language teaching. In your answer, make sure to define sociolinguistics and refer to specific studies, explaining the relevance of each to L2 teaching.

2. How, and why, does language vary according to the context in which it is used? In a well-organized and substantive response, provide at least three sets of examples, supported by references, that demonstrate how language varies systematically by region, social group, ethnic group, and/or register choices.
Section IV: Grammar (2 parts — answer both questions)

1. Consider the following six sentences:

   a. Jones said he had asked for permission to see the flight deck.
   b. It has given me time to sort out my priorities.
   c. They told them to make up and talk to each other.
   d. No one has been able to come up with a product that works as well.
   e. If this was new, I wouldn't let people go in.
   f. It is common practice to carry out a series of design point calculations.

Focus on the words underlined in each sentence above. Name the type of multi-word verb or other structure that each of these represents. Then list the major structural and semantic characteristics that distinguish among these structures, giving additional examples of each type.

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. That doesn't mean anything but I think I'll do it then because most of you aren't even taking other classes.
   b. Many grammatical meaning-form relationships are both low in salience as well as redundant in the understanding of the meaning of an utterance.
   c. Scientists say they have made a landmark discovery which could pave the way for new drugs to beat illnesses like the common cold.
   d. I know I can't come to a decision without talking to my supervisor.
Section V: Second Language Acquisition (2 parts — answer both questions)

1. According to current SLA theory and research, what role does explicit knowledge play in second language learning? In your answer, explain the following, making reference to relevant theorists and researchers:
   
   a. theoretical issues related to differences in implicit/explicit knowledge;
   
   b. methods used to empirically examine explicit knowledge in at least two studies; and
   
   c. two pedagogical techniques/practices which, according to SLA researchers, are particularly effective in fostering students’ explicit knowledge.

2. An area of controversy in SLA is the role that individual differences plays. Compare two theoretical approaches that make different claims on the role of one individual difference, such as age, motivation, cognitive style (note that these are examples; you may choose any individual difference). Cite relevant references.