

## MA-TESL Comprehensive Exam for January, 2017

**Directions:** This examination is a “closed-book” exam. That means that students may not use any reference materials while answering these questions; students may not consult notes, books, and/or articles during the examination. Those students who are writing the examination by computer/word processor may not access any additional files or documents that may be either on the hard-drive of a computer, available through a network, or available on the Internet.

There are five sections to this test. All MA students must take the section on ESL Foundations and Methods. MA students will choose two additional sections from the other four sections: ESL Curriculum and Program Administration, Sociolinguistics, Second Language Acquisition, and Grammar. Students in the Ph.D. program, taking the test for screening purposes, can answer the questions in any three sections.

You will have four hours and fifteen minutes to complete this test, including breaks as you need them. You should plan to spend approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes on each of the three sections that you choose to answer. In each area, there are two questions. You must answer both questions. Thus, you should plan to spend approximately 40 minutes per question.

Your answers to the questions should be well-written, and they should synthesize the relevant knowledge in a coherent and insightful manner. You should include references to specific sources and studies, including current scholarship. We recognize that this test will require rapid written responses; however, you should be aware of the need to write as clearly and effectively as possible.

- Begin the answer to each question on a new sheet of paper.
- Number your pages.
- Write the last four digits of your university identification number in the top right hand corner of every sheet of paper.

### **Section I: ESL Foundations and Methodology (2 questions, answer both)**

**1.** In discussions of English as a second/foreign language teaching and learning, the following terms and teaching methods are often mentioned:

- (1) Corrective Feedback
- (2) Motivation
- (3) Noticing
- (4) Task-based language teaching
- (5) A post-method era

Select THREE of these terms. For each one, (a) define it to show its breadth and complexity; (b) explain its significance for language learning in general; and (c) discuss how such concepts can be incorporated into teaching of English as a second/foreign language. Include concrete examples to illustrate your points. Refer to relevant literature as appropriate. Be sure to include (i) a brief introduction that tells your reader which three terms you plan to discuss and (ii) a brief conclusion to provide some closure to your response.

2. With each and every year, teachers have access to new instructional materials and/or new technologies (e.g., textbooks, Web sites, YouTube, video, software, podcasts, email, Skype, Second Life) that can be used to enhance their teaching of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). Assume that you have been asked to develop a lesson that focuses on only TWO skills.

- In a short introductory paragraph, briefly identify the TWO skills that you will target and describe the instructional setting of choice (i.e., location, age of learners, learner's proficiency levels, and major goals and objectives).
- Then identify the range of materials and/or technologies that you will use to promote student improvement in the TWO target skills. Provide a rationale for your selections and the ways in which each type of material and/or technology will be used to accomplish your goals and objectives for each skill area. Identify the limitations of the materials and/or technologies and provide examples of activities that you are likely to create to make up for the identified shortcomings. Be sure to demonstrate your understanding of the complexities of the targeted skills in your response. Refer to the literature when appropriate.

## **Section II: ESL Curriculum and Program Administration (2 questions, answer both)**

1. Imagine that you have just been hired in a well-established language program. You've been asked to re-design an intermediate-level language course to meet the needs of current students. You will be given "release time" from teaching during your first semester in the program to re-design the course. You will then be assigned to pilot the new course during your second semester. You've been given total freedom to use your TESL background to guide you in the course-development process.

What steps will you take to design the course, from early information gathering to the actual piloting of the course? Describe each step in detail, referring to relevant literature when appropriate.

2. The planning of curricula involves multiple interrelated steps, including the following: (a) the planning and execution of situation and needs analyses; (b) the consideration and determination of principles that will guide curriculum development; (c) the formulation of general goals and more specific objectives; (d) the consideration and possible blending of different syllabus types; (e) the determination of course foci and the selection of content; (f) the evaluation and possible selection of textbooks and the development of instructional materials; (g) the implementation of the curriculum (and the courses within it); and (h) the monitoring and evaluation of student progress, student responses to the curriculum, and the program as a whole.

Choose THREE (3) of the steps of the curriculum planning process listed above and discuss them in turn. For each part of the process, provide a detailed explanation of the following:

- the value of the step as part of the overall curriculum planning process;
- its relationship to other steps;
- the main issues to be considered and the key questions to be asked;
- the range of decisions to be made.

In your brief introduction, identify the three steps that you plan to explore in your response. Refer to relevant literature as appropriate.

### **Section III: Sociolinguistics (2 questions, answer both)**

1. The central focus of sociolinguistics is linguistic variation, attempting to account for patterns of variation by reference to non-linguistic factors, such as social class, geographic region, situational context, and communicative purpose. Within sociolinguistics, there are several major approaches to the study of linguistic variation, each making different theoretical assumptions, employing different methodologies, and asking different kinds of research questions. Some examples of these approaches include the study of social dialect variation, regional dialect variation, pragmatics, cross-cultural communication, conversational analysis, register variation, and the sociology of language.

Compare and contrast three of these approaches with respect to their theoretical assumptions, methodologies, and kinds of research questions. In your descriptions, include identification of the researchers strongly associated with each approach, and discussion of example case studies.

2. The linguistic description of conversation has been approached from two major perspectives: conversational analysis and register analysis. Conversational analysis focuses on the exchange structure of interactions (e.g., turn taking), while the register perspective focuses on the frequent lexico-grammatical features of conversation (e.g., pronouns).

Using the conversation below, describe and illustrate four linguistic characteristics of casual face-to-face conversation associated with each of these two perspectives (i.e., eight linguistic characteristics in total). Then discuss why conversation has these characteristics, and why it is important for language teachers to understand the linguistic characteristics of conversation.

This conversation took place in the kitchen of Jill's house. Sara is visiting Jill for the weekend. Sara got up early and went to the kitchen to start making breakfast. Jill slept in and has just walked into the kitchen.

01 <Jill> Good morning.  
02 <Sara > Morning.  
03 <Jill> How are you?  
04 <Sara> Good.  
05 <Jill> Did you sleep ok?  
06 <Sara> Yeah, just fine. How about you?  
07 <Jill> Yeah, good. I had a dream about Nancy - Do you remember Nancy?  
08 <Sara> Nancy?  
09 <Jill> Sure you remember from high school - she got skinny, though.  
10 <Sara> Oh yeah, I remember her.  
11 <Jill> Yeah, she lost all that baby fat.  
12 <Sara> Mm. [long pause] So how's your dad? I haven't talked - I talked to him once this summer.  
13 <Jill> Oh. He's doing okay, he seems to be -  
14 <Sara> - he seems to be doing ok, right? Is he still exercising and -  
15 <Jill> Oh, yeah.  
16 <Sara> He's really into that, isn't he?  
17 <Jill> Yeah, that's for sure. [pause] It's kind of cold in here, isn't it?  
18 <Sara> Yeah, I just opened the window to get rid of the fish smell from last night. You can go ahead and close it.

#### **Section IV: Grammar (2 questions, answer both)**

1) Describe the syntactic and semantic characteristics and differences among the types of restrictive relative clauses (finite and nonfinite) and noun complement clauses (finite and nonfinite). Give specific examples to illustrate the characteristics.

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. I think the best way to figure it out is to write down what you already know about the problem.
- b. Who was the first person you had to fire?
- c. At a committal hearing, a Magistrate will decide if there is sufficient evidence for the defendant to be tried in the Supreme Court.
- d. So, that's the explanation of how I know I want to keep working on these projects.

#### **Section V: Second Language Acquisition (2 questions, answer both)**

1. According to current SLA theory and research, what role do attention and noticing play in second language learning? In your answer, make sure to discuss:
  - (1) The theoretical underpinnings of attention/noticing (including noticing gaps and noticing holes) and methodological ways in which noticing has been documented empirically across studies;
  - (2) Three pedagogical techniques/practices which according to SLA researchers are particularly effective in fostering students' attention and noticing and, hence, learning.

Throughout your answer, make sure to use particular studies to illustrate your points.

2. Cognitive approaches to SLA differ with respect to the extent that the cognitive mechanisms that support second language learning in adults are domain specific (dedicated solely to language learning) or domain general (shared with other types of cognitive processes such as induction, deduction and automaticity). Compare and contrast these two approaches to the study of SLA with respect to (a) the nature of the theories that inform these approaches; (b) the categories of language analysis used; (c) the nature of the elicitation instruments used; (d) the types of SLA findings reported; and (e) the implications for pedagogy, if any, derived from these studies.