

Teaching Range English to International Students

Rebecca Templin

International students have become increasingly visible in the range science department at Utah State University. Approximately 30% of USU's range graduate students now come from foreign countries. Most have been awarded scholarships by their governments or by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) in order to acquire the technical training needed to manage their native rangelands. The vast majority of these international students are academically well qualified, experienced range technicians. As graduate students in the U.S. their main handicap in improving their technical knowledge of range management lies with the language. Most must learn English as a second, third, or even fourth, language when they arrive.

Because the USU studentbody now includes 1,100 international students, the university has developed an intensive English program for providing basic English skills. But even the most intensive basic English course can not adequately prepare the African, Latin, or Arab student for the colloquialisms, jargon, slang, dialects, and accents employed by typical American lecturers of range science.

In 1979 transcripts of range lectures made by Linda Watanabe, a Utah native and a graduate of USU's English as a second language program, first revealed certain patterns of range lecture presentation. In order to observe which particular presentation patterns proved most difficult for international students, I began attending an introductory course in range science in the spring of 1980. I sat in the section of the auditorium where international students congregated, taped each lecture, and made observations. From these observations I noted a number of problems.

Many of the students took at least half their notes in their native language. A student said later that he took his notes in Arabic because the lecturer spoke too quickly and he couldn't follow everything in English. Between lectures he translated his notes back into English. He admitted this was a time-consuming, frustrating process but until his English improved he felt he had no alternative.

Students often look at each other's notes or asked other students, usually other non-English speakers what had just been said. Conferring usually occurred after rapid, idiomatic English ("the Southwest is a land fit only to graze rattlers"), acronyms (BLM, USDA, SCS, AUM), or cultural references (the Homestead Act, the MX).

Watching international students taking range lecture notes, I also noticed that the lecturer's pronunciation was so often misunderstood that students wrote *sheep grass* for *cheat grass* and *hulling water* for *hauling water*. Sometimes



Becky Templin at work bridging the language chasm.

passages of notes showed that the student had misunderstood entire segments of lecture because of poor comprehension and note-taking skill.

International students also had problems in being understood. Often when one phrased a question, American students nearby could be heard asking one another what had been said. International student questions were either inaudible, perhaps from fear of speaking, or incomprehensible, usually because of accent, grammar, or choice of words.

The range department was interested in correcting these problems and encouraged me to initiate a special course, Range 490: *Range Communication Skills for International Students*. Ten new and returning international students were recruited. We used the taped lectures as a basis for listening and note-taking exercises. The students were also instructed in survival skills appropriate for the educational system of an American university. These skills included reviewing course syllabi, outlining a quarter reading schedule, answering short essay test questions, and using the tape recorder to supplement and review lecture notes.

In mid quarter the Range 490 students suggested that they practice their English speaking skills by giving individual seminars. These proved to be a learning experience for not only the students but for the Range 490 instructor and the range department faculty who were invited to attend. Because most of the students were older, experienced range technicians, they could provide a fascinating picture of management practices and problems far different from those in

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Utah and unique to such areas as Niger, Morocco, Mexico, and Kenya. The series of Range 490 international student seminars offered both students and faculty a new forum for discussing a variety of range conditions and management practices as diverse as *Opuntia* control of Chihuahua or stock reduction in Mauritania. For the first time the emphasis on teaching was the international student's knowledge and experience. This brought about a new perspective and a rewarding sense of satisfaction for the student. One noted at the end of the course that "for the first time I was able to give a lecture in class without fearing the audience and fearing that my English was bad."

The orientation which the Range 490 course provided not only aided students in surmounting linguistic and academic problems but insecurity and lack of confidence as well. A strong sense of comradery emerged from the class. This sense of comradery was recognized by the department and incorporated in new office space assignments. This has made it possible for a much larger number of international students to share graduate student offices with American students. More international dialog has resulted. One new

American graduate student commented recently: "The experience of sharing so much time with such interesting people from so far away has made my education here something totally new and unforgettable."

Similarly, the Range 490 students are reporting improved grades and a more positive attitude. Most now attend all department seminars and participate more actively in such social occasions as vacation field trips and out-of-state conferences. The department is now planning an annual orientation session especially for new international students, which would include visiting Utah rangelands, learning some technical jargon, some of the plants, and getting an idea of the management problems in the region. In addition several departmental courses are now offered with an international emphasis in which student seminars are a regular feature. There is a new recognition of the wide diversity of range experiences which international students provide and a new appreciation on the part of both internationals and Americans for the benefits this diversity brings to a range science education.

Old West Range Judging Contest Starts Second Go-Round

F.R. Gartner

The Sixth Annual Old West Range Judging School and Contest was held in Rapid City, South Dakota on October 5 and 6, 1981. Rapid City also hosted the inaugural regional contest in 1976. In subsequent years Halsey, Nebraska; Buffalo, Wyoming; Billings, Montana; and Washburn, North Dakota, hosted the event. Over 750 people competed in the first five contests.

The outdoor classroom on October 5 began in a cold, rainy atmosphere but ended in sunshine. Forty native plants were flagged on three range sites, enabling contestants to walk through an "open book" type of range examination. *Rod Baumberger*, SCS Area Range Conservationist, *Jim Johnson*, SDSU Extension Range Specialist, and *Wayne Weaver*, SCS State Range Conservationist, assisted each group through the practice sessions. Range site and condition differences were explained and utilization of key grasses discussed.

The "shotgun start" on a crisp, fall morning found 12 contestants at four sites with judging cards and pencils in hand. Wyoming was the only state not represented at the contest—hopefully not a signal of a shift in emphasis from range management.

The top three in team competition were:

FFA Teams	4-H Teams	Open Teams
1-Cascade, MT	1-Montana 4-H, Bozeman	1-Gordon, NE
2-Malta, MT	2-Gordon, NE	2-Cascade, MT
3-Harlowton, MT	3-Meade County, SD	3-Panhandle Range Club, Scottsbluff, NE

The top three contestants in the three age categories were:

Freshman- Sophomore	Junior-Senior	Post-High School
1-Mark French, Malta, MT	1-Larry Berg, Harlowton, MT	1-Duane Gebhardt, Cascade, MT
2-Mike Warren, Rapid City, SD	2-Mark Kruger, Gordon, NE	2-Glenna Abbott, Gordon, NE
3-Chad King, Philip, SD	3-Mike Zurich, Cascade, MT	3-Kirk Stone, Gordon, NE



A group judging at an Overflow range site north of Rapid City at the Old West Regional Range Judging School and Contest, October 5 and 6, 1981.