

MIGS Narrative, P1, 4-9-24

Data sources: 4 Interviews during 1st year of grad studies at “UDUS”, 7 surveys

Pseudonym: P1 = ‘Davi’

I. Background

(Language) Background

Davi is a Masters of Science student in Animal Biology. He received his Bachelors of Science in Animal Science from a university in Brazil. In 2019, Davi did a brief visiting scholar/study abroad program at a university in the U.S. Davi had been working in his lab for about 6 months before he started his Masters. As his PI and many of his lab mates (including “Bruna”) are from Brazil, they often use Portuguese (Davi’s L1) in the lab. Given that he works in a lab, Davi’s MS is a more research-focused program. In fact, his PI asks that he write 2 articles and submit them for publication during the program.

At the beginning of the study, Davi had only been learning English for 3 years. He self-evaluated his proficiency around the intermediate level in all 4 skills in fall ‘22 and summer ‘23, although his level of comfort with using English for writing term papers, a thesis, publishable papers, correspondence, and presentations all increased from the beginning to the end of the year. Fall ‘23 was the first time Davi had taken content courses in English, which he described as causing an affective reaction: “I was afraid about having classes in English for the first time. But I think I’m holding well” (interview 1). He was advised to only take English-focused classes in his first quarter to improve his communication skills.

Career trajectory

Davi desired to study at UDUS because “it’s the number one [school] in the world in [his] field.” After graduating from his MS, he desired to “get a good job in a worldwide company” (demographic questionnaire). In essence, he wanted to work in industry, although he did discuss potential interest in pursuing a PhD during the interviews. He also wavered about whether or not he wanted to work in the US or Brazil after graduation. At the end of the 2 year interview process, Davi informed me that he had returned to Brazil and was working in industry.

Previous writing experiences

Davi contributed to a research project led by a master’s student while he was completing his BS and wrote a paper on it to fulfill a degree requirement.

II. Coursework & other writing experiences during 1st year

Fall quarter:

Davi spoke highly of the writing experiences he had in “English for International/ESL Graduate Students” and the feedback he received in that class from his instructor and peers. He mentioned that he was not working on writing research articles yet because of his early program stage. Instead, he was in the process of writing fellowship application letters and ethics board documents (the IRB equivalent for Animal Biology). Davi described receiving useful feedback

from his PI on how to persuade the fellowship committee to give him the award, which he viewed as applicable for a variety of future professional writing contexts. He focused on his “English for International/ESL Graduate Students” professor’s feedback on the summary and response assignment for our interview.

Winter quarter:

In winter, Davi wrote his first abstract for an academic conference, on which he received feedback from his entire lab (especially a postdoc and the PI) and from collaborators at other institutions. He was also busy TAing, taking courses, and running analyses for his lab. He mentioned in winter and spring that he was worried about writing a thesis and desired to find better model texts on which to base his own MS thesis.

Spring quarter:

Spring was difficult for Davi because he had to TA for a course outside of his area of expertise, leading him to spend “too much time” on TAing. As a result, he had to drop grad classes and allocate time away from research. Additionally, his PI was on paternity leave and could only meet with Davi in the wee hours of the night. Despite the drawbacks, one of the positives of TAing was it helped him develop his English communication skills, both orally and in email writing. He mentioned that he would complete much of the writing for his MS during the summer, specifically 2 research articles for the *Journal of Dairy Science* that he and his PI had been planning.

Summer:

Davi traveled home to Brazil, which made his English rusty (in his opinion), worked on research, and presented at an international conference. He was primarily focused on finishing his first manuscript, with the goal of submitting it for publication in the near future. He had been meeting with his PI one-on-one to discuss chunks that he had written and to receive conference-style feedback, “step by step, sentence by sentence” (Participant 1, Interview 4, Pos. 35). Once they finished the manuscript, Davi planned to send it to the postdoc in his lab for feedback, and then to their collaborators from other universities for feedback.

III. Feedback: **Affective** responses, effect of **motivation** to revise and continue writing, & effect on **agency**

Fall quarter:

Davi reacted positively to his “English for International/ESL Graduate Students” professor’s feedback, claiming that he felt “proud of his work” (interview 1). He did not have to revise it, and he did not revise. However, Davi emphasized that he appreciated the lessons he learned from the feedback. When responding about agency, he spoke more in general terms rather than describing how this specific case of feedback affected his agency. He emphasized that international graduate students tend to trust the feedback they receive because they feel that the providers have more experience than they do and can help improve grad students’ papers.

Winter quarter:

Davi reacted positively to the feedback on his abstract from his lab and collaborators because “they’re trying to help me” (interview 2). The feedback motivated him to revise and continue writing because of the positive impact that the feedback would have on the abstract. Although Davi felt full agency over the abstract, he listened to the feedback because he valued his lab’s and collaborators’ expertise. Davi claimed that the feedback helped him to think more critically about which evidence to include, to be more concise and precise, and to help his audience understand his points.

Spring quarter:

Davi didn’t receive writing feedback in spring quarter because he dedicated most of his time to TAing, and his PI was on paternity leave.

Summer:

Davi reacted positively to the feedback, which he attributed to his PI’s feedback style: “He knows how to put the words to not upset us” (Participant 1, Interview 4, Pos. 169). Davi praised the feedback for helping him grow as a writer and for the piece to grow through clear explanations about writerly choices. He felt positively motivated to revise and continue writing because he knew that his PI’s suggestions would “make [the manuscript] better.” Davi reported having full agency over the piece because the feedback always came in the form of a discussion. He emphasized that he values listening to his PI because the PI has more expertise than him.

IV. Feedback: Effect on **motivation** to continue in graduate school & feeling of belonging in academic **community**

Fall quarter:

Davi claimed that his “English for International/ESL Graduate Students” professor’s feedback did not have an impact on his feeling of belonging in the academic community. Rather, general moments of misunderstanding (due to English proficiency) led him to “feel bad” (interview 1). On the end-of-quarter questionnaire, he selected “Somewhat Agree” to the statement that the feedback he receives from all of his feedback providers motivates him to continue in his graduate program. In the mid-quarter questionnaire, all responses were “Somewhat Agree” except for those relating to the feedback from “my course professors” and “my mentors,” which were “Neither agree nor disagree.” Hence, the impact of feedback on Davi’s motivation to continue in his grad program was between neutral and slightly positive, likely because he wasn’t receiving considerable feedback from his PI or disciplinary professors.

Winter quarter:

Davi mentioned that feedback helped him reflect on the ways in which he was changing over time and to provide confirmation that he was on the right track for grad studies and for his academic community. Additionally, the feedback caused him to feel like the sacrifices he had made to complete his MS in the US were worth it. Receiving feedback from multiple professors

made him feel “my research is pretty important for my field” (Participant 1, Interview 2, Pos. 112).

Spring quarter:

Davi didn't receive writing feedback in spring quarter.

Summer:

Davi felt motivated to continue in grad school because of the sense of support he felt from his PI through his feedback. Although he didn't necessarily feel more part of his academic community because of the feedback per-se, he commented that the process of demonstrating his knowledge in writing made him feel like he had the expertise to be a member of his academic community.

V. Changes over time

In fall '22, Davi received considerable writing- and language-focused feedback in “English for International/ESL Graduate Students”. He didn't mention receiving writing feedback in courses during winter, spring, or summer quarters '23. Most of Davi's feedback after his first quarter came from his PI, labmates, and collaborators while working on research-writing tasks such as fellowship applications (fall '22), abstracts (winter '23), and research articles (summer '23). Through the process of gradually taking on, and succeeding in, more complex disciplinary writing tasks (from abstract to paper), Davi felt more and more like a member of his community and increasingly confident in his writing abilities.

VI. Differences across feedback providers

In fall '22, Davi highlighted the value of peer review, especially when combined with professor feedback. He found peer and professor feedback useful both to improve the paper and to support you emotionally: “But some feedbacks, like from your PI, or even from friends, American friends, for instance, can cheer you up” (interview 1).

Throughout the interviews, Davi expressed his appreciation of his PI's feedback and style of offering feedback. He contrasted his current PI with his BS PI who was harsher but taught Davi how to take critical feedback. Davi stated that he's learned a lot about how to write through his current PI's feedback (“it's like a class,” interview 4). He claimed that he would have needed more resources for writing support if his PI wasn't so helpful.

Given the collaborative nature of Davi's research, he receives feedback from members of his lab and the international research team. In winter '23, he discussed having great availability of feedback from a postdoc because they sit next to each other in the lab. Davi also described how he receives different kinds of asynchronous, written feedback from different professors in his research team (changes vs. suggested edits). He appreciated both professors' feedback for helping him improve as a writer and for the abstract to improve.

Summer '23 was the first time that Davi mentioned AI. He had been using ChatGPT for sentence-level feedback, copying and pasting sentences that he's written and asking AI if they're “right” or if there's any way to “improve this sentence” (interview 4). While that application was useful, AI had led him astray by making up false sources. When I asked him about the difference between human and AI feedback, he responded, “from the human

feedback I can learn, and from the AI feedback, I just have an answer that I will probably forget.” [Interestingly, he changed his answer to this question in winter ‘24!] He emphasized that we shouldn’t trust AI without checking its answers ourselves.