

# A PhD Research Proposal

## Challenges in English Academic Writing: Indonesian Graduate Students' Experiences in Hungarian Higher Education



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Research Context



- Increasing number of Indonesian students enrolled at Hungarian universities due to *the Stipendium Hungaricum* scholarship program: Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral Degree (recent numbers : more than 150 students)
- In 2019, most of the students were enrolled in **Master Programmes** (PPI Hongaria, 2020)
- Indonesian students as International students in Hungary
- The use of English as a medium of instruction at the university (EMI) in a non-English speaking environment (Macaro et al., 2018)
- Academic writing is one of the most **essential requirements** in Higher Education (Crossley, Kyle, & McNamara, 2016; Staples et al., 2016; Zhu, 2004).
- **Academic writing studies** : genre, registers, cohesion, corpus-based studies, strategies, challenges, writing development (Hyland, 2008; Hyland & Diani, 2009; Pessoa et al., 2014, )

## 1.2 Research problems

- EMI causes academic adjustment problems: i.e. **anxiety** and **frustration** in understanding specialist terms and learning content in EMI courses (Paulsrud & Toth, 2019; Zou, 2020)
- **Various academic activities**: attending lectures, individual/group presentation, discussion, written assignments (Sing, 2015)
- Students' academic writing challenges: **writing tasks** as a high stake assignment (Tardy, 2004)
- The importance of producing **a quality academic text** (i.e., coherence, cohesion, linguistic features) (McCully, 1985; Russel, 2014; Crossley, 2020)
- Students' academic success :
  - **strategies** in academic writing (Okumara, 2006)
  - **writing development** in higher education institutions (Gregori-Signes & Clavel-Arroitia, 2015)

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Challenges of academic writing in a non-native English speaking environment

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**Academic resources** : e.g. limited English books, lack of support from the faculty (*Subandowo, 2020; Phothongsunan, 2016*)

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**Writing strategies**: e.g., poor time management, making reference, word-by-word translation, and developing ideas (*Phothongsunan, 2016; Okamura, 2006*)

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**Linguistic issues** : e.g., lack of vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, weak paragraph-level cohesion (*Phothongsunan, 2016; ; Biber & Conrad, 2019; ; Pessoa et al., 2014; Langum & Sullivan, 2017*)

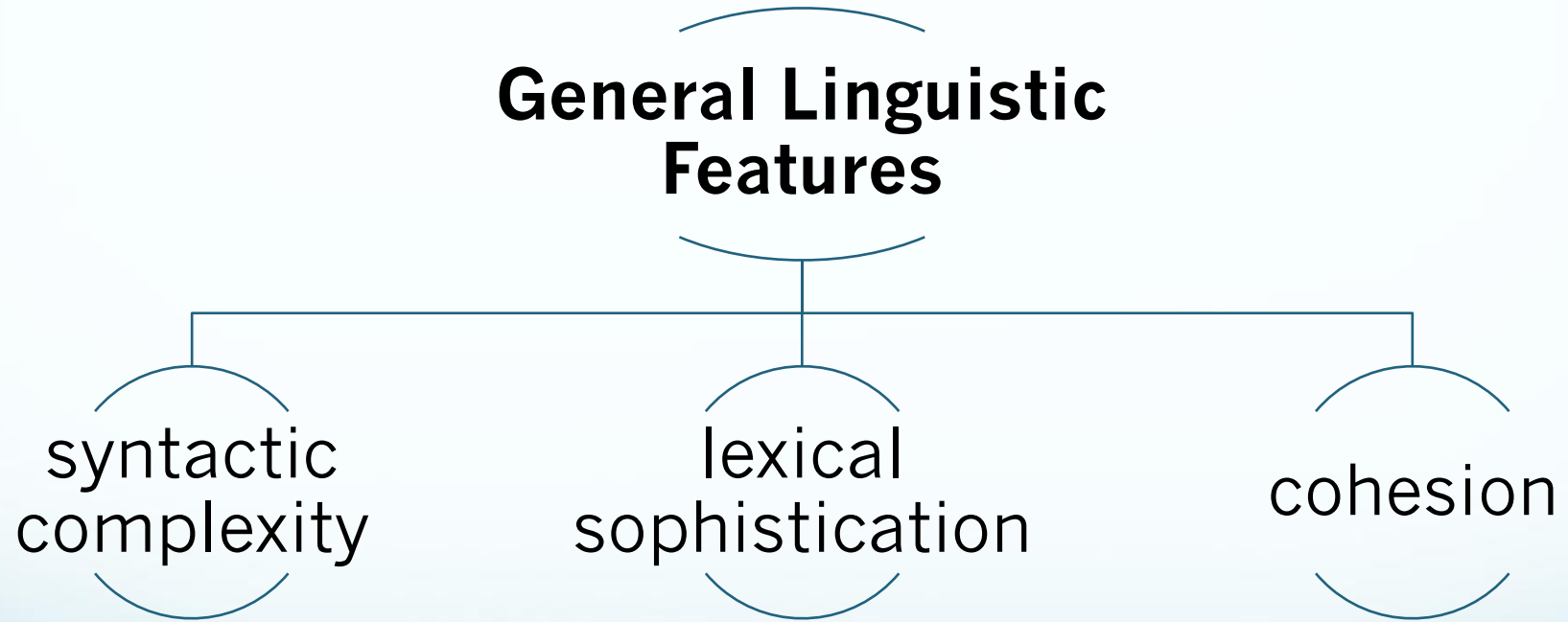
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**Academic conventions**: e.g., citation and plagiarism) (*Phothongsunan, 2016; Weigle, 2002*)

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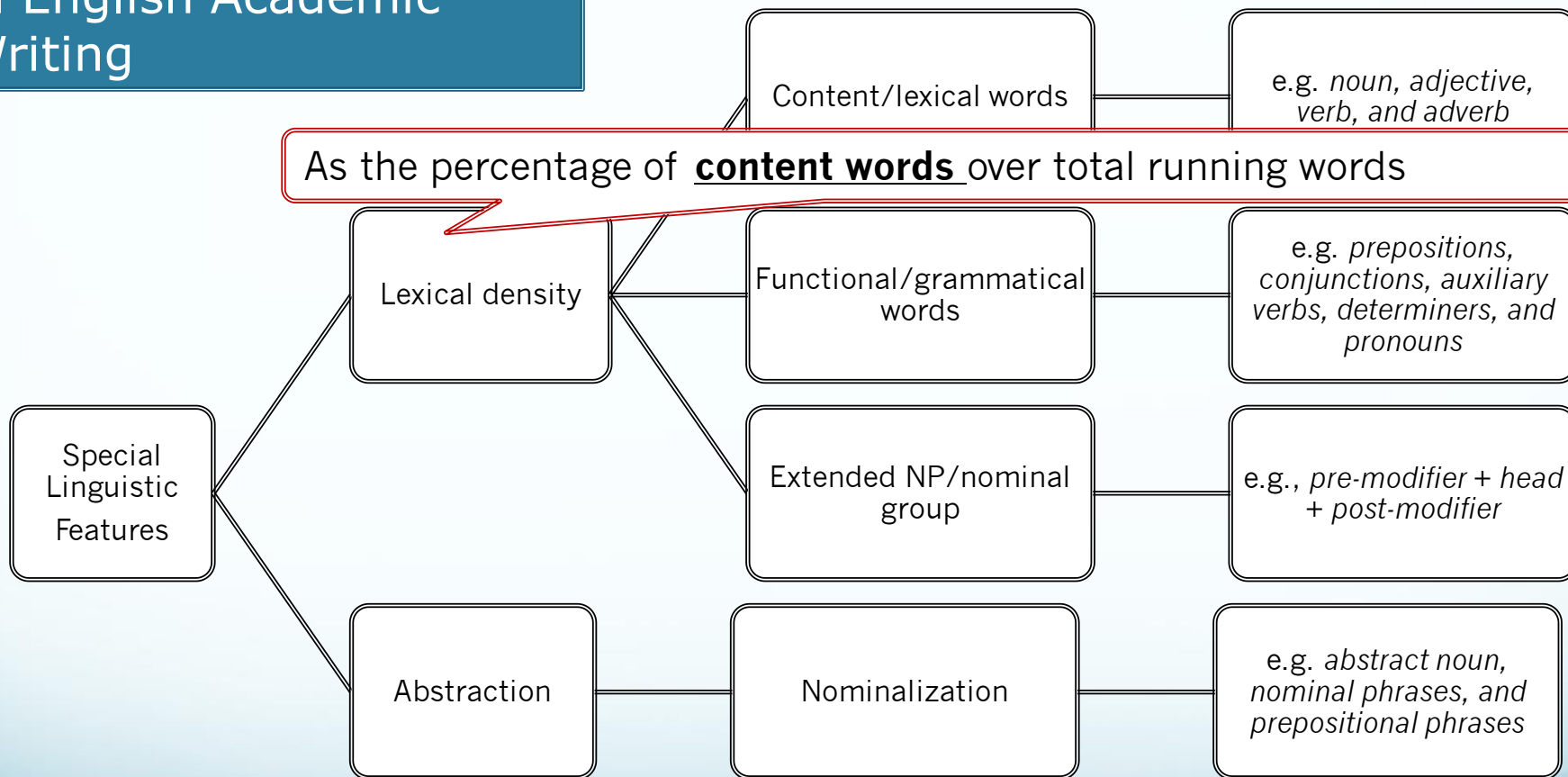
**Motivation and affective factors**: e.g., a long and stressful process, attitudes to academic writing) (*Phothongsunan, 2016 ; Weigle, 2002*)

## 2.2 Linguistic Features in English Academic Writing



(Biber, 1996; McNamara, et al., 2010)

## 2.2 Linguistic Features in English Academic Writing



(Halliday, 1989; Fang, 2004)

## 2.3 English academic writing development



- Writing development of students' writing tasks (Crossley, 2020).
- Social science students tend to use nouns and nominalization during the level of study (Staples et al., 2016).
- MA students' texts typically involve nominal phrases (Parkinson and Musgrave, 2014).
- 17 year-old students produced more lexical density than adult students (Johansson, 2009).



# 3. Research Design

## 3.1 Aims and research questions

### Aims :

- To investigate Indonesian graduate students' experiences in academic writing including:
  - Attitudes towards English academic writing both from the students' and their teachers' point of view
  - Challenges and potential solutions to tackle these challenges
- To examine students' English academic writing development including:
  - Students' progress during their master study (from semester 1 to semester 4) in terms of lexical density and abstraction
  - The relationship between these features and students' progress according to their initial English proficiency levels (C1 and B2)



## Research questions:

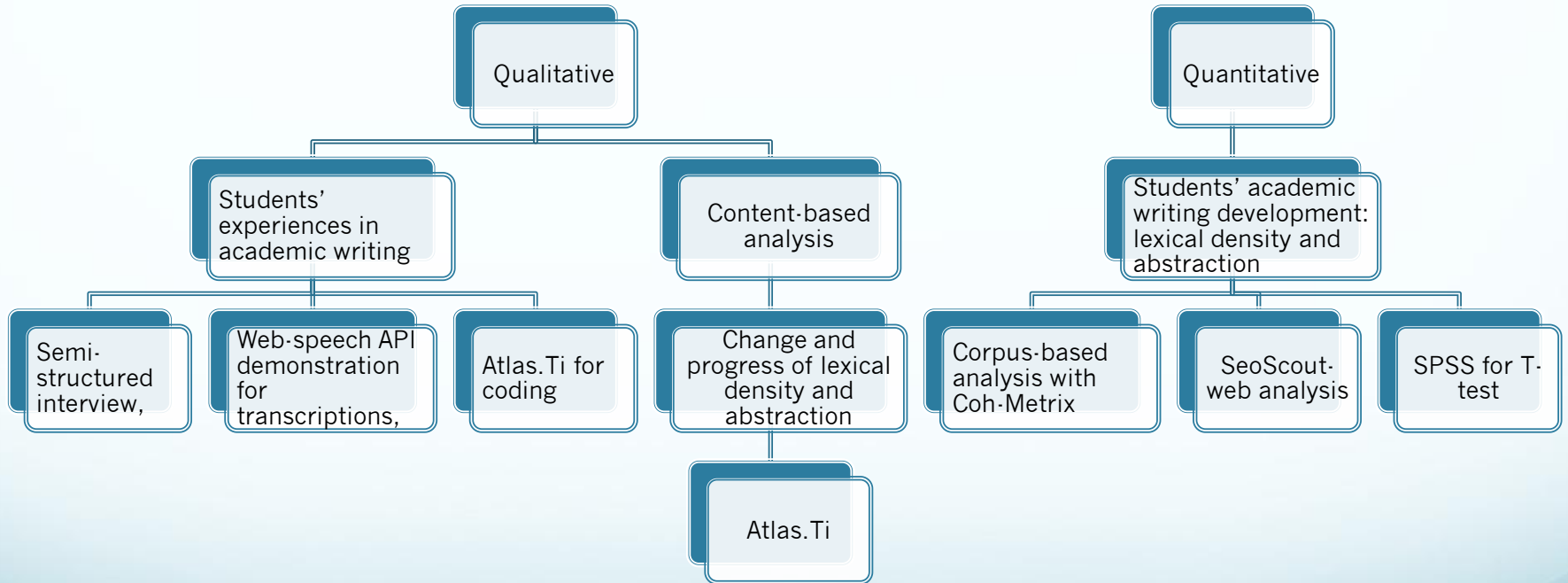
### Students' experiences in academic writing

1. *What attitudes do Indonesian graduate students have regarding English academic writing?*
2. *What attitudes do teachers have regarding English academic writing?*
3. *What challenges do students face in terms of English academic writing?*
4. *What challenges do teachers face in terms of English academic writing?*
5. *What strategies do students apply to tackle these challenges?*
6. *What strategies do teachers apply to tackle these challenges?*
7. *Do students' academic writing strategies develop during their study programme? If so, to what extent and how?*

## Students' academic writing development: lexical density and abstraction

- 1. To what extent does the level of lexical density change in students' academic essays during their master studies?*
- 2. To what extent does the level of abstraction change in students' academic writing during their master studies?*
- 3. Is there a relationship between students' initial levels of proficiency and their progress in terms of informational density?*
- 4. Is there is a relationship between students' initial levels of proficiency and the their progress in terms of abstraction?*

## 3.2 Research Methods



(Based on Dornyei's (2007) mixed-methods research and Cohen et al., (2017)

## 3.3 Participants



- The Faculty of Social Sciences at three different universities in Hungary
- 7 MSc and MA graduate students enrolled in 2019/2020
- International Relations (MA) (n=4), Social Integration (MA) (n=1), and Regional and Environmental Economics (MSc & MA) (n=2)
- Entry level: C1 (IELTS 7.0 -7.5) and B2 (IELTS 6.0 - 6.5)
- 6 professors from the students' universities

## 3.4 Data collection techniques



### Interview

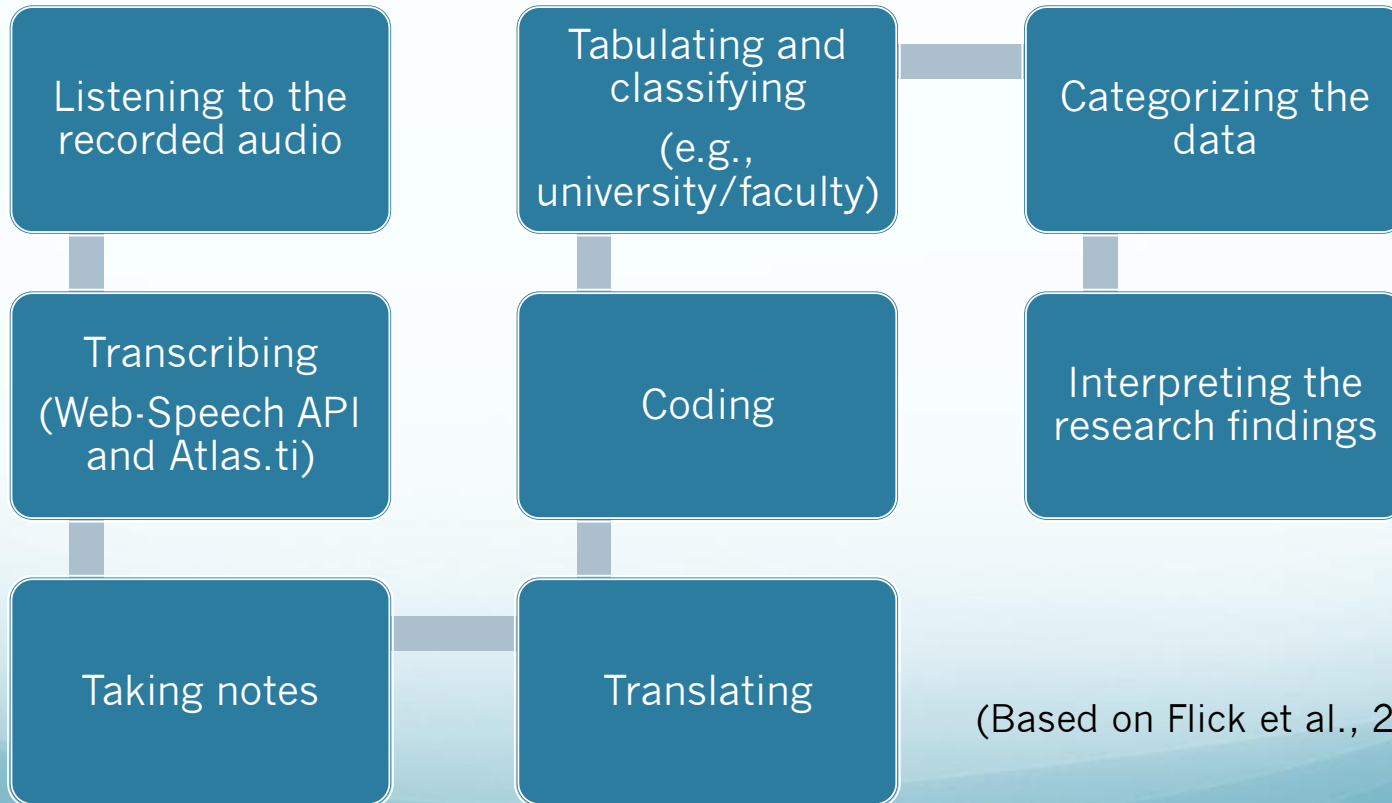
- $\pm$  1 hour semi-structured interview
- 3 sessions with the students (Fall 2020 – spring 2021)
- 1 session with the teachers (Fall 2021- Spring 2022)

### Text Analysis

- Genre = Essay
- 1 high stake essay/semester/student  $\pm$  1500 words
- Total = 28 essays and  $\pm$  42000 words

## 3.6 Data analysis

### Qualitative analysis



(Based on Flick et al., 2004)

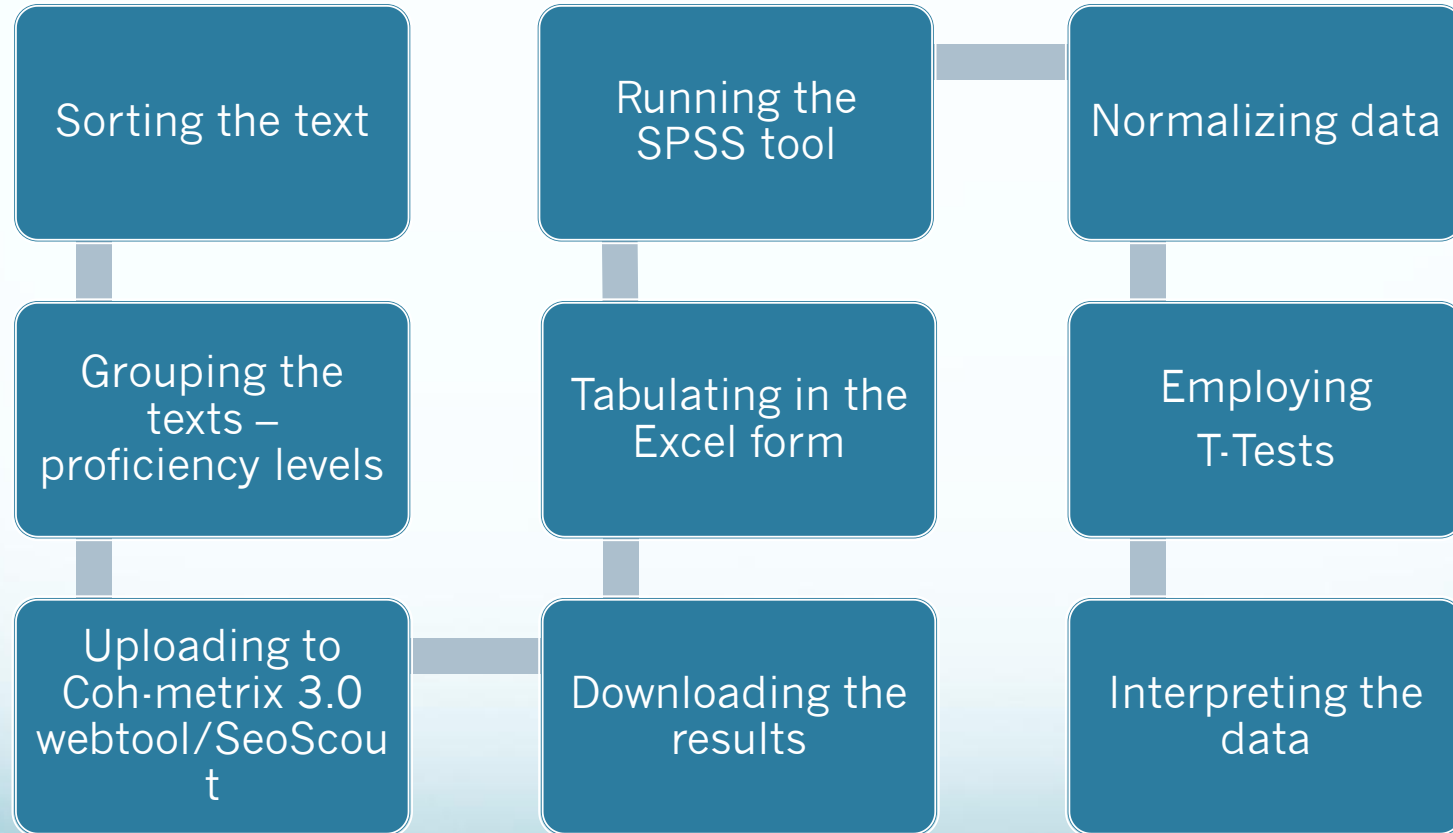
## Content-based analysis



Cohen et al., 2017



## Quantitative analysis



Based on Graesser's (2004) Coh-Matrix analysis and Nasseris' (2021) statistical procedures

## 4. Preliminary Research Results

**Challenges and experiences** : time management, linguistic difficulties, plagiarism, learning platform

**To tackle the challenge** : making draft, reading research articles as well as social media or web-based information platforms, teachers and groups' presentations

**Attitudes** : studying in Hungary and teachers' feedback help improve their academic writing

**The comparison of information density between Indonesians' higher and lower English level students:** C1 level students produce texts containing more content words than B2 level students.

**The comparison of abstraction between Indonesians' higher and lower English level students:** C1 level students' texts are more abstract than B2 level students' texts.

# Relevant talks and publications

- **Talks/Conferences**

- 1) The Teacher Education and Higher Education Studies (EDiTE) of ELTE "*Challenges in English Academic Writing: Indonesian Graduate Students Experiences in Hungarian Higher Education*" (December 4 - 5, 2020)
- 2) 28 (Online) Congress of Hungarian Applied Linguistics, April 19th-20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 "*Linguistic Features of Indonesian Graduate Students' L2 English Academic Texts: A Comparative Study*"
- 3) The 67 TEFLIN International Virtual Conference & the 9<sup>th</sup> ICOELT 2021, Indonesia "*The Perspective of Academic ESL/EFL Writing in A Non-Native English Speaking Environment*" September 9 & 11, 2021 - Padang, Indonesia"(Accepted)
- 4) The Doctoral School Conference (3) - Pázmány Péter Catholic University -January, 2021 "*A Comparison of Linguistic Features in Indonesian Graduate Students' L2 English Academic Texts*"
- 5) The Doctoral School Conference (2) - Pázmány Péter Catholic University - June, 2020 "Issues in L2 English Academic Writing"
- 6) The Doctoral School Conference (1) - Pázmány Péter Catholic University - January, 2020 "*Challenges in Academic Writing: A Mixed-Method Study of Indonesian Graduate Students in a Non-Native English Speaking Environment*"

- **Forthcoming Publications**

- 1) Proceeding Publication - The 28<sup>th</sup> Congress of Hungarian Applied Linguists "*Linguistic Features of Indonesian Graduate Students' L2 English Academic Texts: A Comparative Study*"
- 2) Proceeding Publication - The 67 TEFLIN International Conference "*The Perspective of L2 English Academic Writing in a Non-Native English Speaking Environment*"

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# **Thank you very much !**

Questions and feedback are always welcome