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

Academic resources : e.g**.** limited English books, lack of support from the faculty (*Subandowo, 2020;Phothongsunan, 2016*)
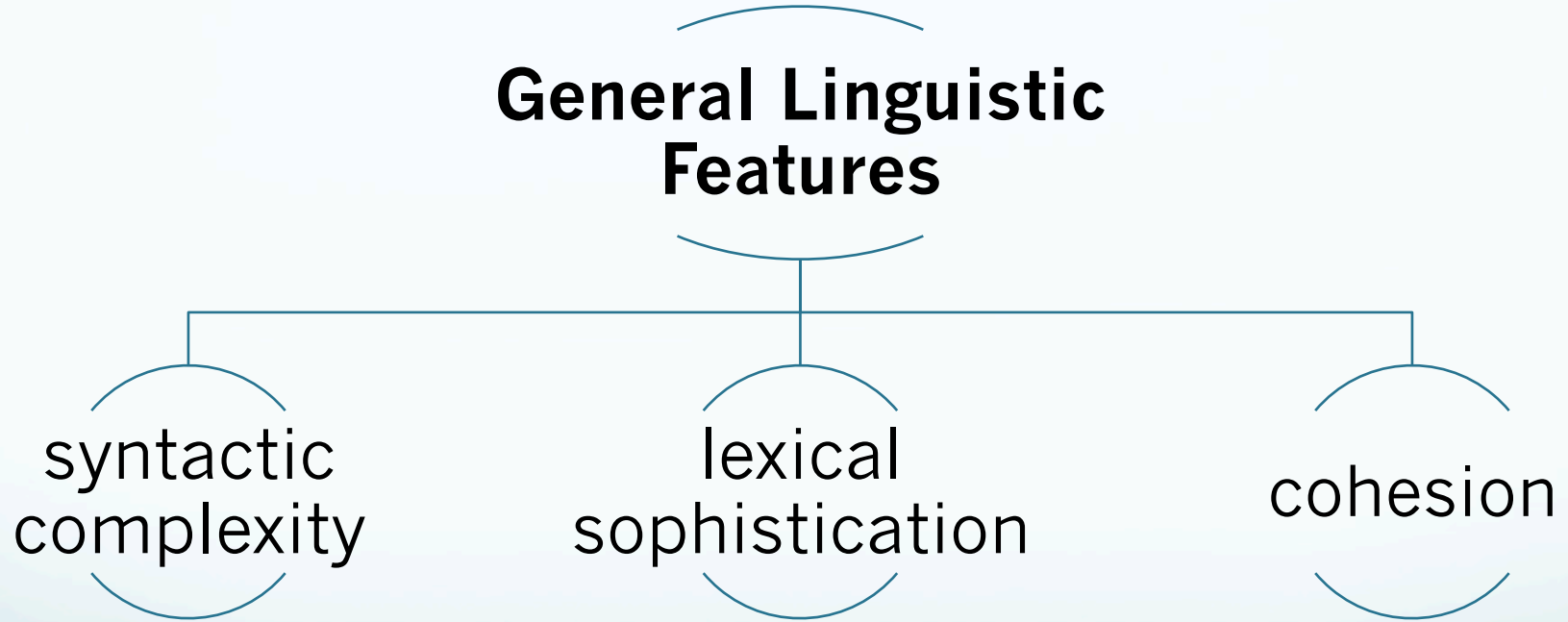
Writing strategies: e.g., poor time management, making reference, word-by-word translation, and developing ideas (*Phothongsunan, 2016; Okamura, 2006*)

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*)*

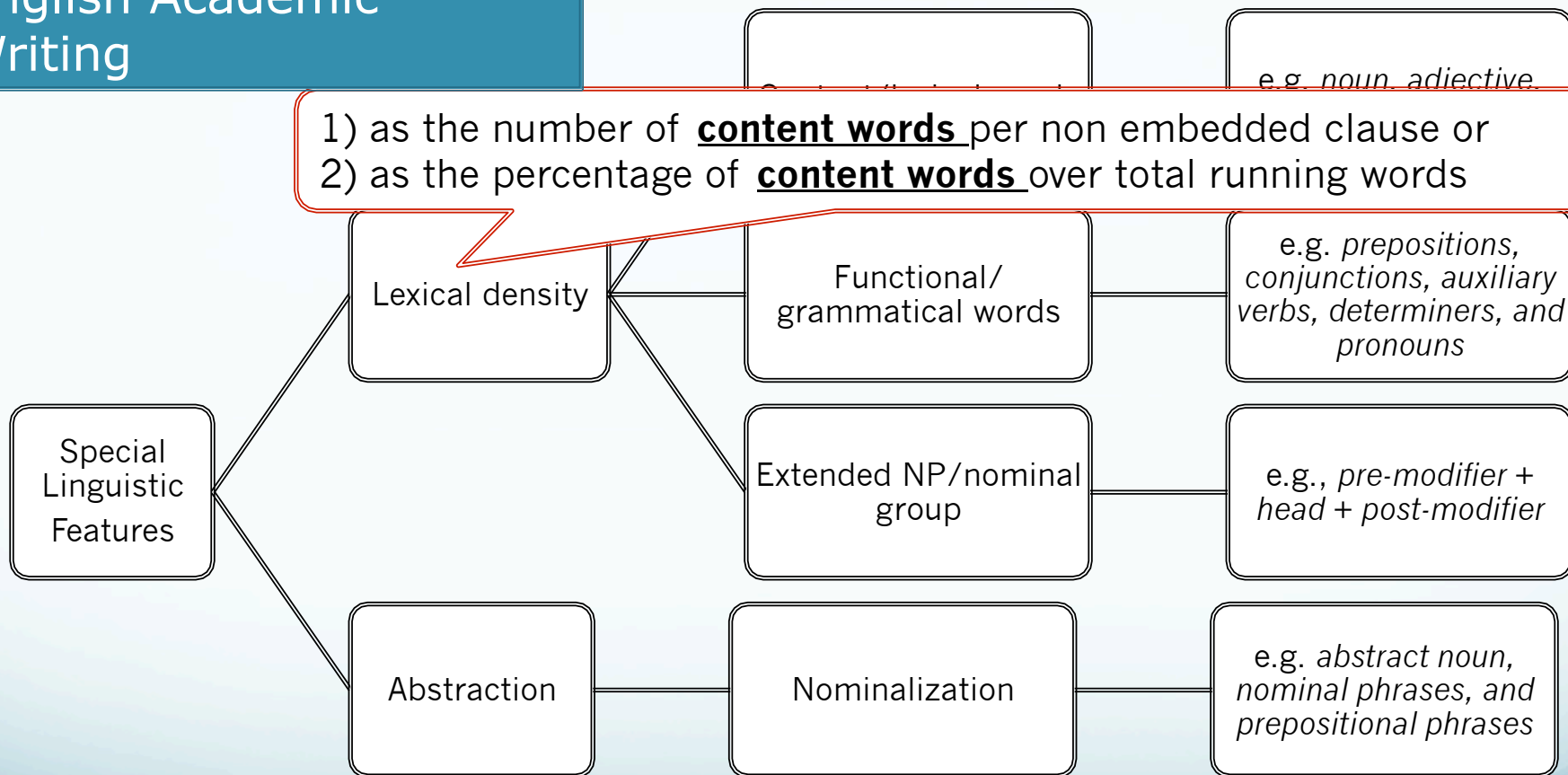**Academic conventions**: e.g., citation and plagiarism) (*Phothongsunan, 2016; Weigle*, 2002)

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

General Linguistic Features

syntactic complexity

lexical sophistication

cohesion

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

Special Linguistic Features

Lexical density

1) as the number of **content words** per non embedded clause or
2) as the percentage of **content words** over total running words

e.g. *noun, adjective,*

Functional/ grammatical words

e.g. *prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, determiners, and pronouns*

Extended NP/nominal group

e.g., *pre-modifier + head + post-modifier*

Abstraction

Nominalization

e.g. *abstract noun, nominal phrases, and prepositional phrases*

(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).

3.1 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)
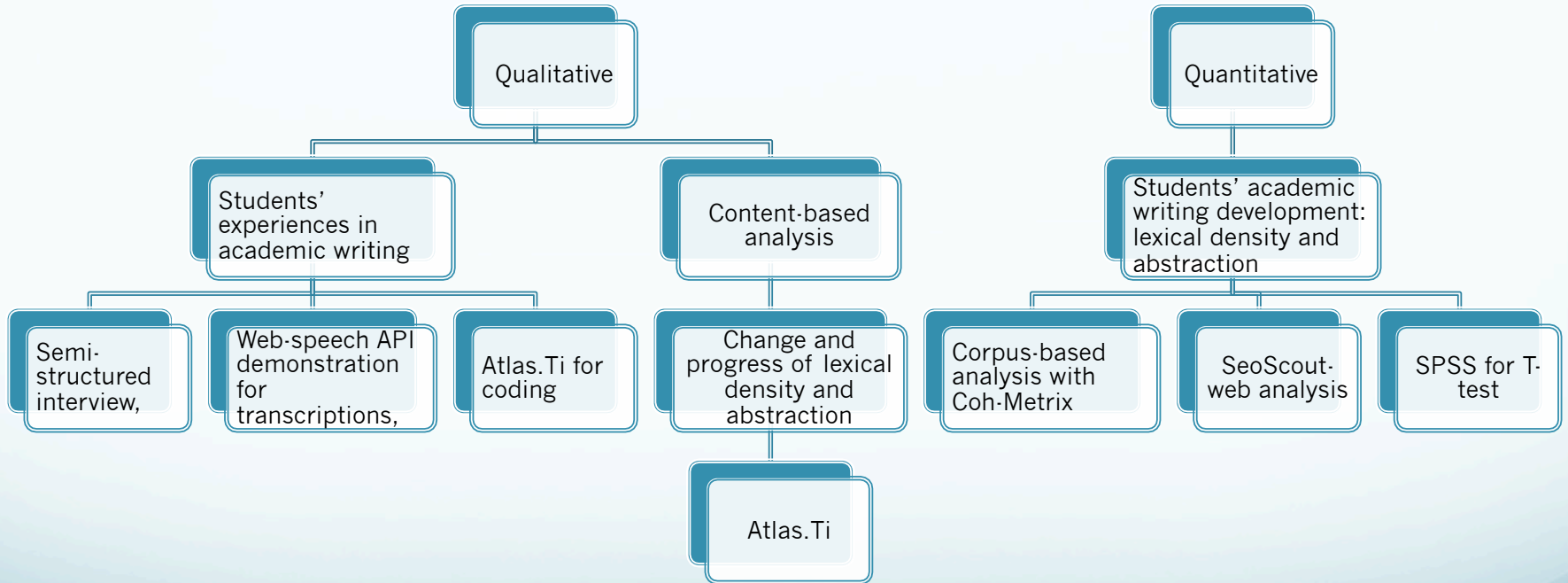
Research questions:

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

Qualitative
- Students' experiences in academic writing
  - Semi-structured interview,
  - Web-speech API demonstration for transcriptions,
  - Atlas.Ti for coding
- Content-based analysis
  - Change and progress of lexical density and abstraction
    - Atlas.Ti

Quantitative
- Students' academic writing development: lexical density and abstraction
  - Corpus-based analysis with Coh-Metrix
  - SeoScout-web analysis
  - SPSS for T-test

(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
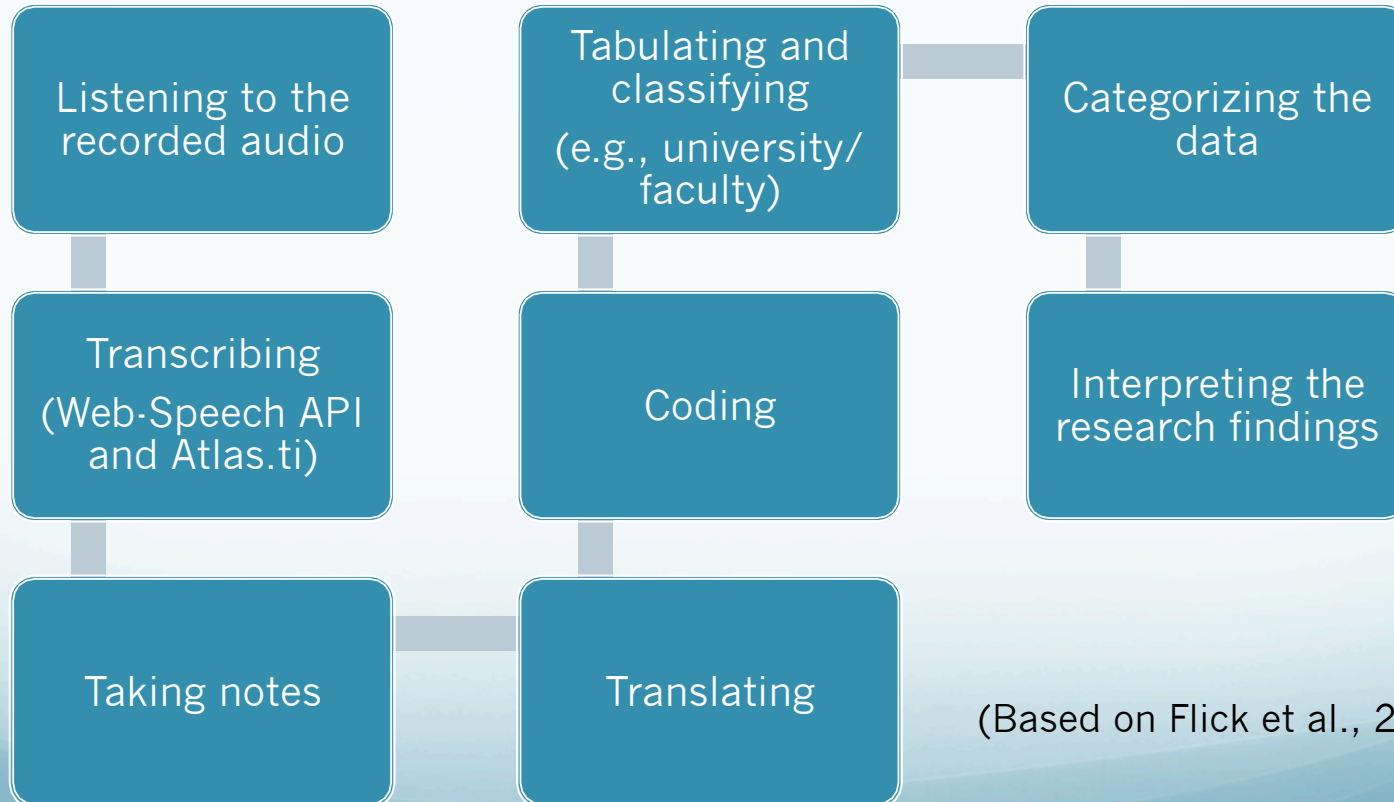
3.4 Data collection techniques

Interview

- ± 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 ± 1500 words
- Total = 28 essays and ± 42000 words
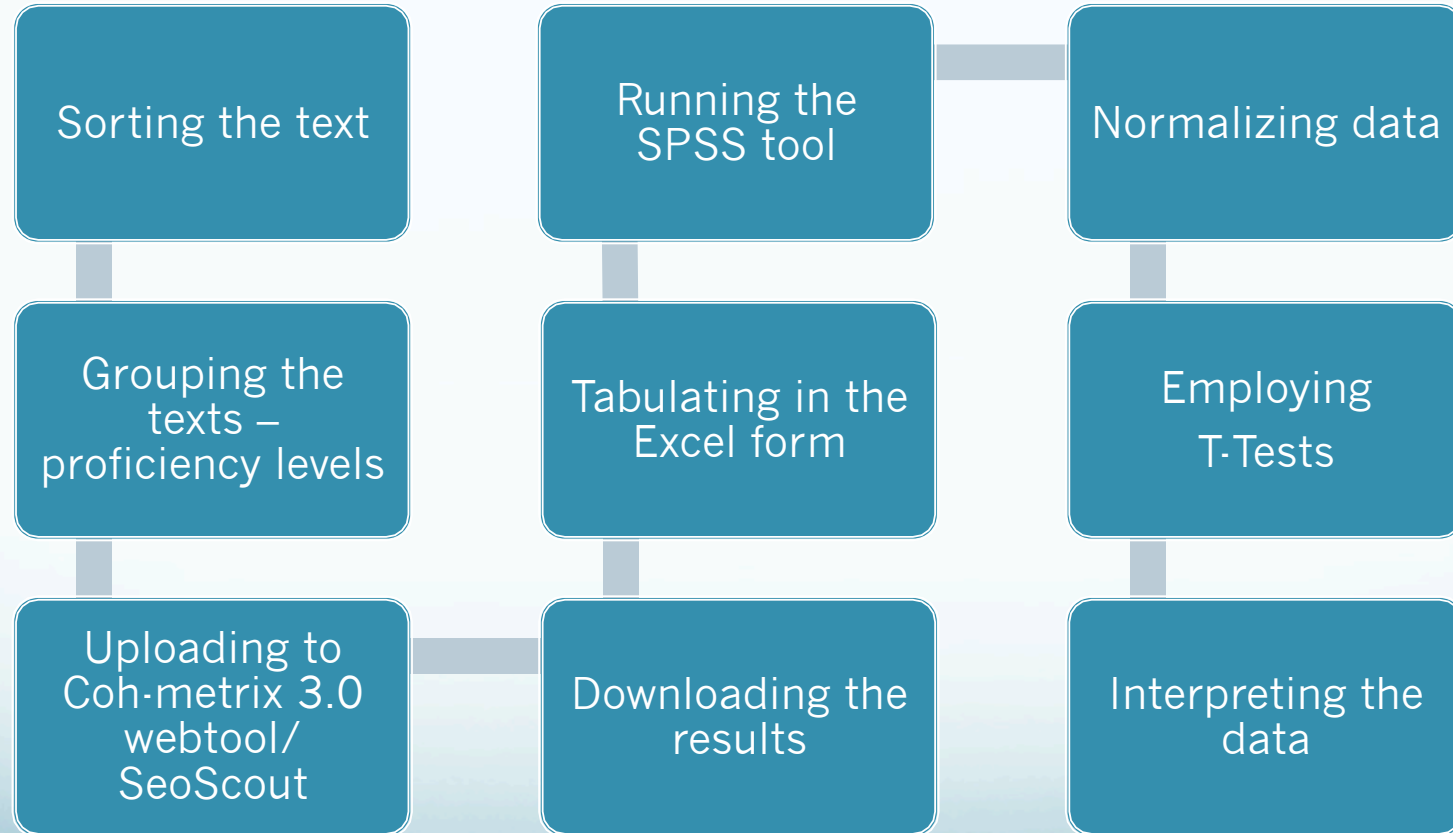
3.6 Data analysis

Qualitative analysis

Listening to the recorded audio

Transcribing (Web-Speech API and Atlas.ti)

Taking notes

Tabulating and classifying (e.g., university/ faculty)

Coding

Translating

Categorizing the data

Interpreting the research findings

(Based on Flick et al., 2004)

Content-based analysis

Students' texts → categorization → ATLAS.Ti analysis → Interpretation → Report

Cohen et al., 2017

Quantitative analysis

Sorting the text	Running the SPSS tool	Normalizing data
Grouping the texts – proficiency levels	Tabulating in the Excel form	Employing T-Tests
Uploading to Coh-metrix 3.0 webtool/ SeoScout	Downloading the results	Interpreting the data

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

4. Preliminary Research Results

Challenges and experiences : time managemement, linguistic difficulties, plagiarism, learning platform

To tackel 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-20th, 2021"*Linguistic Features of Indonesian Graduate Students' L2 English Academic Texts: A Comparative Study*"
  3) The 67 TEFLIN International Virtual Conference & the 9th 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 28th 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