CHAPTER I

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1.1 The Background of the Study

Reading has been put in the first priority in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Wood (1980:2) says that it is the most important skill since the students much more likely have to read in order to complete their university studies. This is due to the position of English as an international language in which information from all fields of life are mainly stored. In other words, the most important language skill and the main reason people around the world study English as a foreign language is reading. In fact, Indonesia has also put reading skill as the main skill in the teaching learning of English as a foreign language.

The goal of reading is the full comprehension of the text being read. It is a process of reconstructing the meaning of a text by a reader. As Johnson (1983:46) says that a reader reconstructs the writer's intended meaning from his massage encoded in graphic language in order to comprehend a text. This means that there is a significant relationship between the process of getting meaning from a text and the words printed in it. In other words, a reading comprehension requires a reader to understand the meaning of the words that construct the text being read. Not knowing the meaning of particular words in a text, as explained by Freebody and Anderson (1988:99), may cause the general drop of comprehension over the whole text.

In many cases, readers find it difficult to comprehend the text because they do not know the meaning of some words there. However, the readers show various attitudes when they meet a difficult word in a text. This is because their abilities to guess the meaning of unknown word from context are not the same. Therefore, they

may give different interpretations to one difficult word, which then, automatically influence their reading comprehension. In other words, not only does the reader's guessing ability determine his interpretation of a word, but it is also said to be influential in his overall reading ability. Hosenfeld as cited by Levine and Thea Reves (1998:2) even claims that whether a reader is good or bad is determined by his ability to guess the meaning of unknown word from context. In fact, reading comprehension process is a psycholinguistics guessing game.

Top down model of reading says that reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. It means that a reader needs to make intelligent guesses while reading by making use of the clues provided by the context in determining a word meaning in order to achieve a full reading comprehension. There are two reasons of why the ability to infer unknown word meaning from context is claimed to be influential in the reading comprehension. Firstly, the habit of making intelligent guesses is very important since a reader must also predict the text content while reading in order to get the writer's intended message. A reader's ability of making prediction, according to the top-down model or psycholinguistic reading approach proposed by Goodman and Smith as cited by Barnett (1989:19-20), holds a very vital role in the reading comprehension process. It is the starting point for the other three reading processes; they are sampling, confirming and correcting the prediction in the reconstruction of meaning by the reader. As Nation and Coady as quoted by Dycus (1997:1) say that guessing unknown word meaning from context "... involves generalizable skills of interpreting surrounding text, predicting, and testing prediction while reading, which enhance reading skills as a whole." Secondly, guessing unknown word meaning from context requires a reader to pay close attention to the information provided such as the relationship among words and sentences in a text. This information is, of course,

useful and needed for the understanding of the text. As Houlburt (1977:23) explains that by making use of context in determining the meaning of the unknown words, the readers are in the same time actively engaged in the process of translating the printed symbols into the meaningful ideas. This process of understanding words leads to the achievement of the full comprehension of the text being read.

Taking into consideration that guessing ability and reading comprehension are inseparable, the writer attempts to conduct a research investigating the relationship between the reader' ability to guess the meaning of unknown word from context and his ability to comprehend a text. She expects that the result of her research will give a better perspective in the reading process. Thus, it will be a fruitful source in the area of teaching English as a foreign language especially in the field of reading.

1.2 The Statements of the Problem

Based on the background above, the writer wants to design a correlational research to investigate the relationships between the ability to guess unknown word meaning from context and the reading comprehension. Thus, in this research, the writer has research problems as stated below

1. Is there a relationship between the ability to guess the meaning of unknown word from context and the ability to comprehend a text of the third year senior high school students?

   a. Is there a relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students?

b. Is there a relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students based on the pairs of test items?

2. How is the relationship between the ability to guess the meaning of unknown word from context and the ability to comprehend a text of the third year senior high school students?

a. How is the relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students?

b. How is the relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students based on the pairs of test items?

1.3 The Objectives of the Study

Based on the above problems, the objectives of this research are:

1 To see whether there is a relationship between the ability to guess the meaning of unknown word from context and the ability to comprehend a text of the third year senior high school students.

a. To see whether there is a relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students.

b. To see whether there is a relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students based on the pairs of test items.

2 To determine the pattern of the relationship between the ability to guess the meaning of unknown word from context and the ability to comprehend a text of the third year senior high school students.

a. To determine the pattern of the relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students.

b. To determine the pattern of the relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The underlying theory in this study is the theory of top-down model or psycholinguistic approach of reading proposed by Goodman and Smith as summarised by Barnettt (1989:19-22). This theory emphasises the role of meaning and the need to predict when reading by the reader who is regarded as the central of the reading process. Goodman's psycholinguistic approach of reading as cited by Barnett (1989:19-20) views reading process as a cyclical process of meaning reconstruction through predicting, sampling, confirming and correcting. Among the four processes mentioned, the ability to make intelligent prediction holds the most important role as a reader needs to actively predict the text content while reading if he is to get the writer's intended message and achieve a full comprehension. Another thing from this theory is that a reader, in the process of meaning reconstruction, brings subject factors such as interest, motivation, attitude, belief and prior knowledge. This prior knowledge is important since a reader needs to relate the new information to the old concept stored in his brain in order to make sense of a text. While Smith as cited

by Barnett (1989:20) adds to this theory the four reading characteristic that reading is purposeful, selective, based on comprehension and anticipatory. Both of them in the psycholinguistic approach of reading emphasises the role of meaning and the need to predict by the reader who is regarded as the central role in the reading process.

1.5 The Hypotheses

These are the hypotheses from the research problems above:

The hypotheses for the first problem are:

HA / Alternative Hypothesis: It is said that there is a relationship between the ability to guess the meaning of unknown word from context and the ability to comprehend a text of the third year senior high school students.

H0 / Null Hypothesis: It is said that there is no relationship between the ability to guess the meaning of unknown word from context and the ability to comprehend a text of the third year senior high school students.

1. The hypotheses for the first minor problem are:

HA / Alternative Hypothesis: It is said that there is a relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students.

H0 / Null Hypothesis: It is said that there is no relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students.

2. The hypotheses for the second minor problem are:

HA / Alternative Hypothesis: It is said that there is a relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students based on the pairs of test items.

H0 / Null Hypothesis: It is said that there is no relationship between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year senior high school students based on the pairs of test items.

1.6 The Assumptions

The conducting of this research is based on the following assumptions:

1. The subjects of this research have already had an adequate basic of English for the four language skills including reading skill but not be skilful readers yet which allow them to read English reading materials whose level of difficulty are around their reading ability.

2. The reading material has a slightly higher level of difficulty than the subjects' level of intelligence.

3. The subjects' ability to guess the meaning of unknown word from context and their ability to comprehend a text are observable.

4. The guessing ability test and the reading comprehension test used for testing the ability to guess the meaning of unknown word from context and testing the ability to comprehend a text of particular reading material in subjects are valid.

1.7 The Significance of the Study

The writer expects that the result of this investigation of relationship between the students' ability to guess the meaning of unknown word from context and their ability to comprehend a text will give a better perspective of the reading process and be a fruitful source in the area of teaching English as a foreign language especially in the field of reading. She also hopes that this study will help the reading teachers improve their way of teaching reading.

1.8 The Limitation of the Study

This study is limited on the correlation and the regression analysis between the guessing ability test scores and the reading comprehension test scores of the third year of St. Maria senior high school students. This is because the students at this level have already acquired basic of English for the four language skills including reading but they are not be skilful readers yet. The writer will take two classes from the third year of St. Maria senior high school of the school year 1999-2000. One class is the class in which the try out of the research instrument will be done group while the other is the class from which the research data will be collected.

1.9 The Definition of Key-Terms

In this part, the writer defines some key terms used in her study, they are:

1. **Reading Comprehension** is a process in which a reader tries to get a massage encoded in graphic language by a writer (Johnson, 1983:46).

2. **Vocabulary** is the total number of words used a vehicle of the language to express idea (Marksheffel, 1966:236).

3. **Top Down Model** or **Psycholinguistic Approach of Reading** is a cyclical reading process, which emphasises the reconstruction of meaning through predicting, sampling, confirming and correcting by the reader as the central role of the reading process (Barnett, 1989:19-20).

4. **Context** is information of a text that is created by a reader. It includes the reader's real world knowledge about the particular topic and his linguistic knowledge of the inherent relationship of surrounding words, phrases and sentences to any particular word or expression within them.

5. **The Ability to Guess the Meaning of Unknown Word from Context** is the ability to make intelligent inference on the meaning of unfamiliar word in the text by making use of the clues provided by its surrounding words and sentences (Nation and Coady, 1988:97-110).

6. **Unknown Word** is a word whose meaning has not been stored in a student's vocabulary stock.

1.10 Organization of the Study

The arrangement of this study is described as follows: Firstly, the writer would like to state her reason of conducting her research in chapter one. Then, the writer reviews some literatures that support her study in chapter two. In the next chapter, that is chapter three, the writer explains the methodology in conducting her research. While in the chapter four, she presents the data analysis of her research and her interpretation of the findings. Finally, the writer gives conclusion of her research and suggestion for further research in chapter five.