CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Vocabulary size has been a considerable interest to researchers in the field of English as a second language/ English as a foreign language (ESL/EFL) for years. Vocabulary size is an indicator of how well the second language (L2) learners can perform academic language skills such as, reading, listening, and writing (Templeton and Johnston, 2008)

Laufer (1999) says that learners often believe that knowledge of vocabulary is crucial in language learning. The awareness of vocabulary's significant contribution to language acquisition has given birth to the growing development of vocabulary testing. One flourishing area of vocabulary testing is vocabulary size. Some applied linguists believe that the amount of words known by learners seems to be the key aspect in L2 learning. Meara (1996) states that all other things being equal, learners with big vocabularies are more proficient in a wide range of language skills than learners with smaller vocabularies, and there is some evidence to support the view that vocabulary skills make a significant contribution to almost all aspects of L2 proficiency.

According to Levelt (1993) vocabulary is one of the essential and fundamental components of communication. Studies on vocabulary in relation to reading, speaking and writing have been done. In Laufer's study (2010) the findings showed the correlation between receptive vocabulary size and reading

comprehension was high. Koizumi (2005) focused specifically and systematically on associations between vocabulary and speaking. The results of the study demonstrated a high correlation between vocabulary size and speaking. The correlation between vocabulary size and writing ability was also proved by Gelago (2009). His study confirmed that the vocabulary size is related to the quality of written composition. In addition, in term of language proficiency, Nemati (2010) also found the relationship between language proficiency and vocabulary size. In fact it is extensively documented that vocabulary size correlates strongly with language proficiency in general and with other aspect of language competence (Laufer & Nation, 1999).

Therefore, one thing that all researchers can all agree upon is that learning vocabulary is an essential part for the mastery of a second language (Schmitt, 2008). Vocabulary learning is central to language acquisition, whether the language is second or foreign language (Decarrico, 2001) and crucial to the learners' overall language acquisition (Gao, 2003)

There are several reasons why vocabulary, the building blocks of language, is regarded as an important component of language. Firstly, without a rich vocabulary no meaningful communication can take place as communication competence relies heavily on vocabulary (McCrathy, 1990). Even, to acquire a language words need to be known and that a good stock of vocabulary is the key to using the language effectively (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986). Secondly, vocabulary knowledge is one of the predictors of writing quality (Laufer & Nation, 2001).

Writing is defined as a complex process of exploring writers' thoughts and ideas, and makes them visible and concrete (Weigle, 2002). In order to create a well-organized writing, there are some aspects that should be concerned. According to Harris (1969), there are five aspects of writing: 1) content in which the area of the idea expressed, 2) form that shows the organization of the content, 3) grammar that refers to the employment of grammatical forms and syntactic patterns, 4) style, which show the choice of structures and lexical items to give a particular tone or flavor to the writing and 5) mechanics as the use of the graphics convention of the language.

Based on the aspects of writing above, it can be illustrated that writers must have a "toolbox". This "toolbox" is supposed to constantly grow and is filled with items such as grammar, punctuation, and capitalization rules and vocabulary (Delvecchio, 2011). Good writers can pull out the right tools at the right time to make good writing even more powerful. One tool that can power up a written work is vocabulary. Since the meaning of writing itself is exploring writers' thoughts and ideas, writers should have vocabulary that will provide for clear communication of their ideas and thoughts.

Several studies done in linguistic research show that vocabulary size plays an important role in writing. In this sense, vocabulary has been proved to be an important predictor of essay quality in the foreign language. Laufer and Nation (1995) state that vocabulary size and compositions rating correlate to each other. It is difficult to write in a foreign language for writers with limited vocabulary knowledge since in writing process, writers need to have some vocabulary

knowledge of the language in which they are writing to express an idea or message to readers (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). For that reason, writers' lexical knowledge or vocabulary size is likely to influence the quality of their texts.

In addition, lexical richness is often taken to be a reliable measure to assess the quality of a written text, because lexical knowledge is presumably the strongest predictor of writing quality (Weigle, 2002). The richer and more varied the vocabulary used in composition, the higher the quality of the writing. Furthermore, learners have repeatedly mentioned the relevance of vocabulary in writing as to rank it as the most important factor in academic writing (Leki and Carson, 1994), to consider it as a crucial aspect in writing (Polio and Glew, 1996), and to acknowledge the difficulties students have when writing about a topic for which they lack sufficient vocabulary (Tercanlioglu, 2004).

According to the previous study of Galego (2009), there is a positive significant correlation between receptive vocabulary size and essay quality. The study assessed the receptive vocabulary of 274 primary school Spanish learners and determined the extent to which measures of receptive vocabulary size are related to the quality of written compositions. Galego's study is supported by Sakai (2010) who investigated the correlation between receptive vocabulary size and writing skill of Japanese undergraduate students.

The previous studies which have demonstrated a close relationship between vocabulary size and writing quality made the writer interested in finding out the correlations between vocabulary size and writing quality of the graduate students

of Widya Mandala Surabaya Chatolic University. In addition, many studies concentrated on receptive vocabulary size and its correlation to writing but the present study attempts to (a) survey both the receptive and productive vocabulary size of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, (b) analyze the relationship between the receptive vocabulary size and the written production of the students, and (c) determine the relationship between the productive vocabulary size and the writing quality of the students.

1.2 The Problems

Based on the background of the study mentioned above, the problem under this study is formulated as follows

1. What is the vocabulary size (receptive and productive) of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University in this study?

2. Is there a correlation between the vocabulary size and the L2 writing quality of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University? This major problem is divided into minor problems:

   a) Is there a correlation between the receptive vocabulary size and the L2 writing quality of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University?

   b) Is there a correlation between the productive vocabulary size and the L2 writing quality of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University?

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1.3 The Objectives

Derived directly from the above formulated research problems, this study tries to:

1. Find out the vocabulary size of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University.

2. Determine the correlation between the vocabulary size and the L2 writing quality of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University. This major aim is divided into two minor aims:

   a) The correlation between the receptive vocabulary size and the L2 writing quality of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University.

   b) The correlation between the productive vocabulary size and the L2 writing quality of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

In English, there is a relatively close relationship between how many words learners know, as measured on the standard vocabulary tests, and how well they perform on tests of learners' English ability (Schmitt. 2002). Knowing a large number of words in a language, regardless of depth of knowledge, is an extremely important factor in L2 learning (Nation 1990). Vocabulary is the fundamental building blocks of verbal and written communication (Boyken, 2007). It forms the

units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and whole texts are formed. In writing, the way students put the words together is naturally an utmost importance, but ultimately, if students do not have the vocabulary, all the techniques in writing will avail them nothing. Therefore, it can be said that vocabulary is the main building block of writing. The point of writing, after all, is communication, as a result, if students' vocabulary are low, they will not to get their message across.

Some students still cannot use English effectively or even correctly to express their ideas or even correctly while writing. This problem may be caused by those who do not have enough of vocabulary since limited lexical resources seem to reduce writers' possibilities for expressing their ideas (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

It is clear enough that everybody who learns a language as a foreign/ second language hopes to have a large vocabulary size to improve the writing skill. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) also agree that writers, who have the intention of expressing an idea or message to a reader, need to have some vocabulary knowledge of the language in which they are writing.

Moreover, writing and vocabulary are often reported to be interconnected. Vocabulary size has been found to play an important role in writing. In this sense, vocabulary has been proved to be an important predictor of essay quality in the foreign language. Lexical richness is often taken to be reliable measure to assess the quality of a written text, because lexical knowledge is presumably the strongest predictor of writing quality. The richer and more varied vocabulary used

in the composition, the higher the vocabulary size and its correlation to the writing quality of the students of S2 has never been conducted yet in Indonesia. Shawna (2008) asserts that the "breadth and depth of a student's vocabulary will have a direct influence upon the descriptiveness, accuracy, and quality of his or her writing. On the other way around, Nation and Meara (2001) mention that writing activities are necessary to increase the productive use of vocabulary knowledge that learners have receptively.

Empirical studies also support that there is a significant relationship between vocabulary and writing. In Alwasilah's study (2004), it was perceived by most of the subjects that apart from grammar, the low mastery of vocabulary was also perceived to increase the difficulty of essay writing. Laufer nad Nation (1995) found that vocabulary size, use of words of different frequency bands (Lexical Frequency Profile) and composition rating are highly intercorrelated (Laufer & Nation, 1995).

Based on the theory and the previous studies, it is assumed that the more vocabulary learners have, the better the quality of the writing. On the other hand, the less vocabulary learners have, the lower the quality of the writing. Therefore, this current study explores students' composition to find the correlation between their vocabulary size and writing quality.

1.5 The Hypotheses

In view of the fact that this study intends to investigate the correlation between the vocabulary size and the L2 writing quality of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, the temporary answers to the problem statements are formulated as follows:

Ha(a): There is a correlation between the receptive vocabulary size and the L2 writing quality of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University.

Ha(b): There is a correlation between the productive vocabulary size and the L2 writing quality of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University.

To test the alternative hypotheses, the null hypotheses are formulated as follows:

Ho(a): There is no correlation between the receptive vocabulary size and the L2 writing quality of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University.

Ho(b): There is no correlation between the productive vocabulary size and the L2 writing quality of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University.

1.6 The Assumptions

This study is based on the following assumptions:

1. The Receptive Vocabulary Test and the Productive Vocabulary size are considered to be valid and reliable since the tests have been validated by many researchers both in EFL or ESL contexts.

2. The students' scores of the Receptive Vocabulary Level Test and the Productive Vocabulary Level Test represent their vocabulary size.

3. The students' score of an argumentative composition task in ESL Composition Profile represents their writing quality.

1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study

It is a correlational study within a delimited scope of samples using the students of S2 in the English Education Department of the Graduate School of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University Surabaya who have taken the Academic Writing and Advanced English courses in the academic year of 2012-2013.

This study is delimited to focusing on the vocabulary size (breadth), regardless of the vocabulary depth and measuring the subjects' ability to write in standard academic writing in TOEFL iBT writing section.

Therefore, the current study is delimited to studying the correlation between (1) students' receptive vocabulary and their writing quality, and (2) students' productive vocabulary and their writing quality in order to find out which type of vocabulary gives more contribution to the students' writing.

1.8 The Significance of the Study

Practically, the present study can give more insight in the field of language testing for diagnostic purposes. English teachers can learn how to utilize language tests to observe learners' strengths and weaknesses in term of their vocabulary. This study will be beneficial for teachers in providing practical tools to assess and measure learners' vocabulary size, both receptively and productively. An investigation of learners' receptive and productive vocabulary size helps teachers to determine how much the learners know and what they need to learn more.

Theoretically, the findings of the study are expected to be useful information for linguistic observers who are interested in studying and analyzing the correlation between vocabulary size and writing quality and the importance of vocabulary in writing. This study also gives a better understanding of the role of vocabulary size in language learning, especially in writing. It also provides additional empirical evidences for the related studies. The present study may become the source of inspiration for further replication, expansion, or evaluation in order to search more definite perspectives of the investigated area.

1.9 Definitions of Key-terms.

The following is an alphabetically ordered list of terms that are used frequently in the present study:

1. **Correlation.** Correlation is a method of estimating the degree of relationship between the measures (scores) of two or more constructs (variables) by utilizing statistical analysis (Creswel, 2004)

2. **Vocabulary Size**. The term 'vocabulary size' has two forms, that is, receptive vocabulary size and productive vocabulary size. Receptive vocabulary size refers to the number of words that are partially recognized when the meaning sense of the target words are given. On the other hand, productive vocabulary size refers to the number of words that can be partially recalled when compelled to do so by a teacher or researcher in a constrained context such as a fill-in task where a sentence context is provided and the missing target word is supplied (Schmitt, 2002). The vocabulary size in this study focuses on the content words only (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs).

3. **Academic Writing.** Academic writing refers to an independent writing task in TOEFL iBT that measures test takers' ability to state their opinions and express their comments on topics which are based on their knowledge and experience. It must be supported with examples and details in standard academic English.

4. **Writing quality**. In the present study, 'writing quality' is the standard estimation of students' ability to generate and organize ideas, to support those ideas with examples or evidence, and to compose in standard written English in response to an assigned topic (Weigle, 2002).

5. **L2**. L2 is the language a person knows, is learning or is acquiring in addition to his/her native language (L1). The term is used to refer to both foreign and second language (Yule, 2006). In the present study the term L2 is used as a cover term and refers to English as an additional language of the graduate students of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University. This term is also used by Littlewood (2004) as a cover term and refers to an additional language, which is learnt in either kind of situation, either ESL or EFL one.