

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Language is a very important thing in life. Language is used in our daily life to communicate with other people. Without language, we cannot express our feelings, ideas, and desires to the world around us effectively. Therefore, one of the most important purposes of learning a language is to be able to use it for communicating with others.

In communication, ones should be able to express their ideas through words of a language in order to have a successful communication. Kamil & Hiebert (2005) assert that “vocabulary is the knowledge of meanings of words” (p. 2). Additionally, Wilkins (1972) declares that in order to communicate, a command of vocabulary is needed (p. 110). Therefore, it can be concluded that having a limited number of vocabularies limits ones’ ability to express their ideas, while having a wide range of vocabulary enables them to express their idea in a more meaningful way.

English language has language skills and components. Language skills consist of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Meanwhile, language components consist of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary or words. Both language skills and components are important. However, McCarthy (1990) states that "no matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are

mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way" (p. viii). Therefore, words are essential in communication.

Words or vocabularies are required in all language skills, but most importantly, language cannot exist without words. Thornbury (2000) states that "language emerges first as words" (p. 1). Wilkins (1972) states that there is not much value in being able to produce grammatical sentences without having the vocabulary needed. He also says "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p. 111).

Words in the English language can be classified according to their form. According to Kamil & Hiebert (2005), vocabulary or words has two forms, they are productive and receptive. Productive vocabulary is a set of words that a person can use to write or speak. They also state that "productive vocabulary is words that are well-known, familiar, and used frequently". They also assert that receptive vocabulary is a set of words which a person understands or recognizes, though these words are not used in daily conversation. Finally, they conclude that it is likely for most people to have larger recognition of receptive vocabulary than productive vocabulary.

Nation (2001) classifies words based on their frequency: high-frequency words (West, 1953), academic word or vocabulary (Coxhead, 2000) also known as

Academic Word List (AWL), technical vocabulary, and low-frequency words. High-frequency words family was developed by Michael West. West (1953) named this word family *A General Service List of English Words* which contains around 2,000-word families. Academic words are words which commonly occur in academic texts. Technical words covered about 5% of the words in specific texts and were made up of terms of subject area discussed in a specific text or subject area. Low-frequency words consist of all the remaining words of English.

Coxhead (2000) defines academic words as “lexical items that occur frequently and consistently across a wide range of academic material”. Consequently, learning academic words does not only help students in one specific subject, but several subjects. Additionally, learning academic words will help students to understand texts better, because several academic words are already recognized. As a result, learning academic words can help students in their study because academic words do not only occur in one specific subject. Coxhead also asserts that Academic words are usually found in academic texts. Academic texts may include a summary of an article, a report of the results of an experiment, a text comparing two theories, a thesis journal, and English reading passages.

According to Uribe (2008), academic words or vocabularies are words used by the educated, and they occur in academic field at university level and beyond. Therefore, reading passages in a university level should contain academic words or vocabulary. When studying in a university, students read academic texts or passages.

According to G. Fairbairn & S. Fairbairn (2001), English reading passages contain difficult words and jargon. To understand academic texts or passages students need to understand the relationship among clauses, recognize adverbial clauses, and understand the use of logical connectors (Duran et. al, 1989).

One of the subjects in the English Language Education Study Program of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University is Reading A. This subject provides exercises in meaning reconstruction of intermediate level reading passages. It trains the students in identifying specific and supporting details, inferring main ideas, and creating evaluative comments about the context of the passages. With this in mind, this subject is expected to provide many reading passages for the students.

Reading passages for university students should contain academic words. According to Coxhead (2000), approximately 10% of total words in academic texts should be academic words. In line with the previous statement, Liqin & Xinlu (2019) believed that academic texts should contain at least 10% academic words, especially when the texts are intended for academic purposes. Ideally, reading passages for university should contain a considerable number of academic words. Several researchers have done studies about the academic words. Choo, et al. (2017) investigated the significance of academic vocabulary among ESL students, Rossiana (2012) investigated the academic vocabulary focuses on productive vocabulary, which is the academic words coverage of university students' project papers. Other studies investigated the academic vocabulary coverage of textbooks for ESL

university students (Alemi & Rezanezhad, 2013; Liqin & Xinlu, 2014). Finally, Selamat (2016) investigated academic vocabulary coverage of textbook for EFL high school students. In this study, the researcher investigated the academic words coverage of English reading passages for EFL university students.

1.2 Research question

The research questions of this study are:

1. To what extent do the reading passages for Reading A include AWL for readers of university level?
2. What sub-lists of AWL are frequently found in the reading passages of Reading A for readers of university level?

1.3 Objective of the study

This study investigates:

1. The percentages of AWL in reading passages for Reading A to determine whether or not the reading passages are suitable for readers of university level.
2. The sub-lists of AWL in reading passages for Reading A to determine whether or not the reading passages are suitable for readers of university level.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is conducted in order to find out the academic words in reading passages for Reading A. This study is based on the theory of vocabulary and Academic Words.

Vocabulary is the knowledge of meanings of words (Kamil & Hiebert, 2005). In order to communicate with others, a command of vocabulary is needed (Wilkins, 1972). Vocabulary can be classified based on the form and the frequency. According to the frequency, words that occur frequently in university level and beyond are academic words.

Academic words are words used by educated people. They occur in academic field at university level and beyond (Uribe, 2008). Coxhead (2000) compiled academic words which occur frequently in academic texts and developed the Academic Word List (AWL). AWL contains 570 word-families that occur frequently in academic texts. Academic words should occur approximately 10% in reading passages of university level.

1.5 The significance of the study

The results of the study are expected to provide useful information to English Language Education Study Program of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic

University. The study may provide beneficial information about academic words in reading English passages for Reading A. Additionally, the findings of the study are expected to give information about whether or not the level of the reading passages for Reading A is suitable for the readers of university level.

1.6 Scope and limitation of the study

This study investigated the academic words in reading passages for Reading A. There are a total of 12 reading passages used in Reading A, and every reading passage belong to one chapter. In other words, there are a total of 12 chapters and 12 reading passages. In addition, each chapter consists of pre-reading preparation, which includes some questions related to the topic of the chapter. These questions are followed by the reading passage and some exercises. The exercises include fact-finding exercise, vocabulary exercise, and reading comprehension questions. This study focused only on the reading passages. The foreword, glossary, references, instruction, illustration, and texts which are not reading passages are excluded.

1.7 Definitions of Key Terms

Certain key terms are used in this study. They are defined in the following:

1. **Vocabulary** is the knowledge of meanings, form, and usage of words. Knowledge of vocabulary is very important in communication and all language skills.
2. **Academic word** is a word used by the educated, and they occur in academic field at university level and beyond. Academic word occurs frequently in academic textbooks and written academic texts.
3. **Academic word list (AWL)** is a list of 570 word-families which occur frequently in academic texts. The AWL contains words that are beneficial for students, especially those who are studying at tertiary education level.
4. **Token** refers to an individual occurrence of a linguistic unit in speech or writing
5. **AWL token** is the individual unit of words, which are included in the AWL (Academic Word List).

1.8 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one discusses the background of the study, followed by chapter two which presents the related literature to support this study, and chapter three discusses the methodology of this study. Moreover, chapter four presents the results of data analysis and discussion of the findings, and chapter five presents the conclusion and suggestions.