CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

One of the most important things in human life is language. People need language as a means of communication. Mackey (1965:22) says "Language considered from a communication point of view is the transmission of messages; it is the choice of a sequence of symbols from a reservoir of code." Without it, people will certainly find difficulties to communicate with each other. Clark and Clark (1977:3) as quoted by Sriemulyaningsih (2000) strengthen this idea by saying that language is a basic ingredient in virtually every social situation. Language enables us to talk to each other, to share our ideas and feelings. It helps us to develop ourselves as human beings and brings us to reach a higher level of life. Through language, we learn about our surroundings and convey information that we need about the people and the world around us (see Cameron: 1988).

One of the languages that have worldwide spread these days is English. Brumfit (1982:1) states that there are two reasons why English is the most widespread medium of international communication. The first reason is the number and geographical spread of its speakers. The number of English native speakers is enormous. The English native speakers are not only Englishmen, but also Americans, Australians, Canadians, etc. They do not live in one particular area, but they are spread throughout the world. For different reasons, some of those native speakers transmigrate to other countries and bring along their language-English-with them. In Indonesia, for instance, we can find many English native speakers who live and work here. The second reason is the large number of non-native speakers who use it. English is not only spoken by the native speakers. People around the world whose

first language is not English study it. In some countries such as Singapore, English is even used as a second language.

Indonesia is facing the era of globalization. For this reason, many Indonesian people think that they need to learn English. The Indonesian government has facilitated this need through the Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture, number RI/No.0487/4/1992 which was followed by another decree number No.060/4/1993, regulating that the teaching of English should be treated as a local content subject in all elementary schools in Indonesia starting from the fourth grade (Suyanto 1997:166)

These decrees are in line with the idea that the best time for a student to learn a new language is when he is still young. Many language-teaching experts stress this idea. Rubin and Thomson (1994), for instance, claim ".... the best time to begin studying a foreign language is in childhood and the younger you are, the easier it is to learn another language." Prior to Rubin and Thomson, Lennenberg in Klein (1986:9) as quoted by Gozalie (2003:3) claims "Between the age of two and puberty of the human brain shows the plasticity, which allows children to acquire his first language…. If it is possible to acquire another language after the critical period, this is accomplished in a psychologically different and more difficult way."

Teaching English to the students who are still young is really important for the development of their brain. Brumfit as quoted by Gunawan (2004:2) asserts the following three reasons for teaching English at the primary level. First, it is the need to expose children at their early age to the understanding of a foreign culture, in our case the English cultures so that they grow up tolerant and sympathetic to others- the

native speakers of English. When they learn English, children will also automatically learn the culture of the English native speakers which could be quite different from their own culture. Such knowledge will make them become more understanding and tolerant to those native speakers. Second, it is the need of the learners to link communications to the new concepts understanding. Here, English is something new for those learners. In English itself, there are concepts such as the rules, the pronunciation which might be quite different from the concepts in the learners' first language. If those learners are able to understand the new concepts and apply them in communication, they will be able to communicate well. Third, they feel the need to have long exposure in learning a new language, as learning a new language requires a long time. The earlier children start learning a new language, in our case English, the longer the time they will have to master it. Carroll (1967) as quoted by Krashen (1989:43) states that students who study foreign languages earlier achieve better scores. Those who study the target language in high school do better than those who start learning it in college.

Kasbolah (1992:11-12) claims that children learn languages better than adults because they have a unique capacity for language learning. Children do not need to learn the new languages seriously and intensively to be able to master it. Halliwell (1992) claims that children have six general characteristics which help them to learn and grasp new information as much and as quickly as possible and

apply it for communication. The first characteristic is that they are able to grasp meaning. They are very good at interpreting meaning without necessarily understanding every individual word. The second characteristic is that they are creative in using their limited language source to communicate. Children often combine words they know to express certain meanings though sometimes they are not acceptable. Children's instinct for play and fun is the third characteristic. It is the children's nature that they are active and like to play. Fourth, children have the capacity for indirect learning. The next characteristic of children is related to the role of imaginations. Unlike adults, children's imagination is very broad. The last characteristic of children is that they have the instinct for interaction and talk. When they are brought into a new environment where they meet new people, they have the eagerness to communicate and make friends with those people. Unlike adults who often hesitate to make interaction with people in the new neighborhood, children are more flexible. They are not afraid of trying to interact and to talk with other people, eventhough they only have a limited knowledge of the language.

Brumfit (1994: vii) as quoted by Gunawan (2004) claims that children learn a new language more efficiently than adults because of the following reasons:

1. Children's brain is more adaptable before puberty than after.
2. On an early age, it is possible to have acquisition of language without self-consciousness.
3. Children have less negative attitudes to foreign languages and cultures than adults. They are also better motivated than adults.
4. Children's language learning is more closely integrated with the real communication because it depends more on the immediate physical environment than adult language does.
5. Children devote vast quantities of time to language learning, compared with adults.

Realizing the benefits of learning a new language at an early age, many elementary schools these days start teaching English since their students are in the first grade even though the government has officially decided that English is supposed to teach starting from the fourth grade. Some private elementary schools in big cities such as Surabaya and Jakarta even start teaching English to their kindergarten and pre school students. There are also a lot of English courses that offer various kinds of English programs for children even toddlers. One of them is SENTRA: FOREIGN LANGUAGES where the writer has been teaching since March 2005.

Like other languages, English has four basic skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing. At the center of the development of these four skills there are

two major language components namely grammar and vocabulary. This means that in order to gain proficiency in the four skills, the students must rely on their mastery of those two-language components-grammar and vocabulary. They need to have a sufficient number of vocabulary and an adequate mastery of grammar. The grammar of a language is by definition, the inherent rules in the language. Francis (1958:30) defines grammar as the organization of words into various combinations which presents layers of structure such as phrases, sentences, and complete utterances. Looking at the importance of grammar and vocabulary in developing the student's proficiency in the four skills, teachers of English must realize that the teaching of both grammar and vocabulary is equally needed. However, based on the writer's experience and knowledge, many English teachers in Indonesia neglect vocabulary teaching and concentrate on the grammar teaching. Those English teachers do not really realize that it will be useless for the students to only master the rules of the language. If the students still lack of vocabulary, how could they express their thoughts and feelings?

Vocabulary is the key in using the language. When words are unknown, people cannot use them. To this point, Rubin and Thomson (1994:79) claim that a language cannot be spoken, read, understand and written if people do not know a lot of words. Related to the importance of vocabulary learning, Fries (1998) says that learning a language practically always means primarily learning the words of that language. To Hornby (1989:125) vocabulary is the total number of words that make up language. Celce-Muria and Larsen (1992:15) group vocabulary into two: function words and content words. Function words are the words that have little or no lexical

meaning of their own. For example: a, the, of. (Francis, 1958:236). While content words are the words that function as symbol for the phenomena which we react upon as the world of reality about us-symbols for 'things', 'action' and 'qualities'. Celce-Muria and Larsen classify content words into four namely noun, verb, adjective and adverb.

As stated above, vocabulary as one of the language components has a crucial role in the language itself. Development of the vocabulary will help the development of the language competence in our case English. According to Krahshen (1989), there are two ways to develop the competence in English, namely *Acquisition* and *Learning*. To him, acquisition is the subconscious process of developing linguistic concepts and rules. In this process, children acquire their knowledge of English unintentionally in the natural setting. While learning is a conscious process of rule internalization which makes the language learners know the rules of the language, being aware and being able to talk about them. This learning process takes place in formal setting such as school, classroom, and course.

In Indonesia, where English can be categorized as a foreign language, natural settings are difficult to find. The English teaching learning process is mostly done in the classroom which is categorized as a formal setting and identical with language learning (Kiat Boey: 1975). Although, by nature, a language classroom is a formal setting in which language learning takes place, the writer is justified to claim that language acquisition also takes place there if the teacher uses English everytime she is in the classroom with her students. When the teacher of English exposes her teaching and always tries to speak to her students using English, the students will not

only grasp what is taught by the teacher but will also unconsciously acquire what is not intentionally taught by their teacher. Here, both conscious and unconscious language mastery takes place. My point is, eventhough, classroom has been identical with learning and categorized with formal setting, it is possible for the students to acquire "some" language during the teaching learning process in the classroom. To this point, Krashen (1989:47) states"…. the classroom may serve as an "intake" informal environment as well as a formal linguistic environment."(Sic!) Furthermore, he emphasizes that classroom can contribute in two ways: as a formal linguistic environment which provide isolation and feedback for the development of the monitor and as an informal linguistic environment as the source of primary linguistic data for language acquisition.

The writer has been teaching English at SENTRA: FOREIGN LANGUAGES since March 2005. SENTRA is one of the English courses in Surabaya. Its programs are mainly for children. All the teaching staff and students are asked to use English not only during the teaching learning hours but also outside when they are communicating one another. This helps the students acquire some English especially words outside the materials given by the teachers in the classrooms. The writer's students are at the level of "Superkids 1". They are around four and five years old. English is something that is quite new to them. Just like the other ordinary kids, these children love to chat with one another. While they are chatting, they try to use their English. The surprising thing is that these children often utter some words that have never been intentionally taught to them before. Interested in this, the writer would like to find out her students' English vocabulary that has developed through the

learning process and the acquisition process. Fromkin (1996:417) states that in the stage of the children's vocabulary development only the words that carry the main message (content words) occur, while the function words are missing. More specific, Gleason (1998:360) claim that the first class word achieved by children is noun followed by verb, adjective and adverb. Rely on those theories, the writer focus her thesis to the students' content words.

To sum up, the things that made the writer interested in making an observation and write a thesis entitled Vocabulary Acquisition and Mastery of The "Superkids 1" Students of SENTRA English Course are:

1. The importance of teaching English to Young Learners.

2. The importance of vocabulary teaching for developing the student's proficiency in the four skills of English.

3. The possibility of language (in our case English languages) acquisition to take place in the language classroom, although it is a formal setting.

4. The fact that the writer's students often utter the English words that have not been taught.

5. The fact that so far there has not been any thesis at this department written about this topic.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In line with the background of the study, the major problems of this study are formulated as follow.

1. What English content words do the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course acquire?

2. What English content words do the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course learn?

The first major problem has three minor problems:

   1.1. What is the rank of the content words acquired by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course?

   1.2. Which content words are mostly acquired by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course?

   1.3. Which content words are the least acquired by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course?

The second major problem is broken down into the following three minor problems.

   2.1. What is the rank of the content words mastered by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course?

   2.2. Which content words are mostly mastered by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course?

   2.3. Which content words are the least mastered by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course?

1.3. Objective of the Study

In accordance with the above research questions, this study is intended to:

1. Describe the English content words that the students of "Superkids 1" of SENTRA English Course have acquired.

    1.1. Describe the rank of the content words acquired by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course.

    1.2. Find out the content words acquired the most by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course.

    1.3. Find out the content words acquired the least by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course.

2. Describe the English content words that the students of "Superkids 1" of SENTRA English Course have mastered.

    2.1. Describe the rank of the content words mastered by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course.

    2.2. Find out the content words mastered the most by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course.

    2.3. Find out the content words mastered the least by the "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to give contribution to the second language learning and acquisition theories especially in the scope of teaching English as a foreign language to young learners. Hopefully, these findings will give useful information about the vocabulary mastery and acquisition of the subjects under study. In turn, those information will give a picture about the contribution of Teaching

English to Young Learners to the students' acquisition process as well as to the students' learning process. Knowing such information will be useful for the English teachers for young learners in improving their teaching techniques. It is expected that they can create techniques, methods, and atmospheres which enable the students experience both- acquisition and learning process.

1.5. Scope and Limitation of the Study

Being aware of the limited time and the broadness of the topic, the writer decided to limit the scope of this study in terms of the students as the subject of the study and content words as the subject matter of the study. The subjects of this study are the writer's students at SENTRA English Course, in "Superkids 1". They are around three and five years old. They had a little knowledge of English before they enter the writer's class. But, generally they were still unable to their use English for communication. This study concentrates on content words of the students master and acquire after joining the English teaching learning activities for one term. Acquisition and learning are defined by Krashen as two different processes of gaining proficiency in a new language which happened in two different settings. Acquisition takes places in natural setting while learning does in the formal setting. Nevertheless, in this study, the writer is likely to believe that in formal settings like classroom, both acquisition process and learning process are possible to take place.

Besides the scope limitation, there are some other aspects that show the limitation (shortcomings) of this study.

1. The time length of the study under report is only seven months.

    The writer only has limited time to finish her thesis because she wants to graduate as soon as possible. Moreover, the writer is working so that she cannot spend all of her time concentrating on doing her study and writing her thesis. This limited time forced the writer to limit the scope of this study. Due to it, eventhough the writer found out some other interesting things related to the

student's acquisition, she cannot study more thoroughly. However, the writer has tried to make use of her limited time to do the best in making her study meaningful.

2. The writer's background knowledge on the subject matter under study is quite limited.

Since the writer is just an undergraduate student, she only has a little knowledge about the theories related to this thesis. She also knows only some books that become the sources of the theories. This limitation makes it difficult for the writer to deepen her knowledge on the theories that can sharpen the research techniques, and discussion of the findings of this study.

3. Instrument

The instruments used in the data collection are "AIWA" tape-recorder and cassettes. There are 19 cassettes with 60-minute duration used. The other cassettes are not used since the recordings are bad and not clear so that they are not valid for data collection and analysis.

4. The subjects of the study

The subjects this study are children. As ordinary children, they had a high curiosity. This was quite disturbing especially during the process of the data collection. Many times, those children played the tape-recorder and accidentally turned it off. The writer has tried to overcome this by placing the tape in a place that the students could not see and reach, but those children sometimes found and played it again. The amount of subjects also influences this study. There were 7 students who become the subjects of this study. Their ages and abilities were quite heterogeneous. It would be easier for the writer to measure the students' mastery if the number of the subjects was less and they had the similar age and ability. However, if there were more students with more heterogeneous background, there would be bigger chance for the students to interact with various people and could acquire more knowledge- in this case, more content words.

1.6. Definitions of Key Terms

Before the writer comes to the next chapter, it is important for the writer to define the key terms used in this study to avoid misunderstanding. The key terms defined are as follows:

1. **Vocabulary** is a stock of words used by language, class, or individual. (Foreman, 1966:541)

2. **Content Word** is a word that has the lexical meaning of its own. (Francis, 1958:227,231) In this thesis, a content word can be a noun, a verb, an adjective and an adverb.

3. **Lexical meaning** is the kind of meaning that is described in a lexicon/ dictionary (Francis, 1958:231)

4. **Lexicon** is human mental storehouse of information about words and morpheme. (Fromkin ,1996:123)

5. **Second Language Learning** is a conscious process that makes people know all the language rules, aware of the rules and be able to talk about the rules. It is a conscious process of rule internalization, which results either from overt-teaching or a self-study of linguistic rules. (Krashen: 1988).

6. **Second Language Acquisition** is a subconscious process of developing linguistic concepts and rules which is very similar to the process of children acquiring their first language. (Krashen:1989)

7. **Vocabulary Mastery**, in line with number 5, is the words that are obtained through the conscious learning.

8. **Vocabulary Acquisition**, in line with number 6, is the words that are obtained through the unconscious learning.

1.7. Theoretical Framework

In doing the research under report, the writer relied heavily on the following theories: second language acquisition and second language learning theories with special references to vocabulary acquisition and vocabulary mastery, and also language environment theory.

Second Language acquisition theory helps her to understand how children in general and "Superkids 1" students of SENTRA English Course in particular obtain a new language, in our case English. Children learn their very first language- what we usually called as mother tongue- in a very natural way. They do not have to explicitly learn it as they learn math or chemistry. As proposed by krashen (1989), second language acquisition is a subconscious process of developing linguistic concepts and rules which is very similar to the process of children acquiring their first language. Three out of five hypotheses stated by Krashen (1989): The Acquisition-Learning Hypotheses, The Natural Order Hypotheses, The Monitor Hypotheses discuss more to give clearer picture about the process of second language acquisition. The theory of second language acquisition brought the writer to vocabulary acquisition. The terms vocabulary acquisition here refer to the words or vocabulary obtained accidentally by the students through the unconscious learning.

The second way of developing the second language competence is second language learning (Krashen: 1988). Based on the writer experience, during the process language learning, children do not only acquire the language rules accidentally in their natural setting but also learn it consciously from the teaching learning process in their school or course. Krashen (1989) defines second language learning as a conscious process of rule internalization, which results either from overt-teaching or a self-study of linguistic rules. In this thesis, the result of the second language learning process is the vocabulary mastery which refer to the words or vocabulary that the students achieved through the conscious learning.

The theory of language environment is included to expose the setting in which the processes of learning and acquisition take place. Dullay (1992) states that the language environment encompasses everything the language learner hears and sees in the new language. It might include a wide variety of situations and conditions in which the language learners study the language. In other words, the setting. It can be the exchanges in restaurants and stores, conversations with friends as well as classroom activities. Dealing with the language environment, Krashen (1989) states that process of learning usually occurs in formal setting such as school, class, while the acquisition process happens in natural or informal situation. Here, the writer relates the language environment theory to the language exposure. She is likely to ensure that when the language exposure takes place, it is possible for the acquisition process to appear in the formal setting. When a teacher of English exposes her teaching in English and always tries to teach and speak to her students using English, the students will accidentally absorb some new English vocabulary that have not been taught by the teacher.

1.8. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one is the study in terms of its background of the study, statements of the problem, objectives, significance, scope and limitation of the study, definition of key terms, theoretical framework, and the organization of the thesis. Chapter two reviews the existing literature which is relevant to the study under report. Chapter three deals with the study's nature, subjects, instruments, procedure of data collection, and procedure of data analysis.

Chapter four presents the findings and the discussion of the findings. Finally, chapter five closes the study under report by summarizing the whole thesis and providing suggestions for further research.