

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the study. It explains the background of the study, states the problems and the objectives of conducting this study. Theoretical framework, the assumptions and the significance of the study are also given here. The explanations on the limitation of the study, definition of key terms and organization of the study are presented afterwards.

1.1 Background of the Study

Newspaper holds a very important role in human life. The existence of newspaper is regarded as a sign of civilization, instrument and product of development. It is the main source most people turn to when they seek for information (Malrieu 1999:79; Thomas & Wareing 1999:50-51). This is because newspaper enables the readers to go across the time and place boundaries to get the latest news from all fields of life. In other words, newspaper bridges the readers to the worldwide allowing them to communicate information in both national and international context. There is no day without reading newspaper if they are not to be left behind. In fact, the need to read news, for whatever reason it is, has become vital for a complete and 'normal' life.

News is the representation of the world in language (Fowler 1996:5). However, it is almost impossible to expect news that objectively reports and presents facts. This is because newspaper itself is a complex institution (Fowler

1996:2, 20; Thomas & Wareing 1999:51; Goatly 2000:255; Sudibyo 2001:7). It is an industry with its own commercial and political interests, with its every ideology and business point of view, which is extremely socially, economically and politically oriented. In short, news is a commodity that can never be about the mere fact but the fact that is always reported from a particular angle based on some particular interests. It is always presented in such a way to reveal certain interpretations. It determines to be advantaged from social situation and be privileged from political condition in order to make profit. Based on this consideration, news cannot be said as facts that are objectively gathered and presented. On the contrary, it is facts that are deliberately collected and adjusted to the values that suit and reflect the dominant elites of society. Besides this factor, news writer is also found to be a potential source for the news biases. News writer is the one who decides what facts and how they should be reported. He determines the perspective from which the facts are to be seen by the readers and chooses the language in which the news is to be constructed. The news he creates, then, serves as a window through which the writer wants the readers to see, understand and interpret a particular event. As Devine (1981:102) clearly notes, that in a democratic society where freedom of speech assures equal rights to the honest advocate and the demagogue, it is very possible for skillful but unprincipled writers to shape public opinion, influence voters, and affects behaviors.

Researches done by Sudibyo (2001) have shown that political news in Indonesia tended to contain biases. Political news in Indonesia acted as the mouthpiece of the government or certain political elites. In many cases, it was

found spreading prejudices among people and provoking conflicts. In other cases, however, it did character assassination or performed as the judge giving punishment. The researchers also discover that most of the political news writers were immature, in the sense that they could not separate themselves from the issue they dealt with. They could not prevent themselves from bringing their prejudices and assumptions into their texts and could not control and hide their emotion and one sidedness. They actively gave their own opinions, subjective judgments and critics, which very often were merely based on psychological facts and not accompanied by strong arguments and sufficient evidences. Furthermore, news was not made in a proper way; as the writers did not take balanced information covering all sides involved, did field investigations or information crosschecking. Based on this consideration, it can be concluded that the quality of the political news in Indonesia was still far from good. This condition implies that reading Indonesian political news must be done critically to avoid being misled, manipulated and provoked.

Those who need to be able to read Indonesian political news critically most are university students. This is because university students are proven to be active in national movement that brought significant changes in Indonesia's political life, such as the proclamation of Indonesia's Independence Day, Students Movement of 1966, Reformation Movement of 1998 (Kasih & Suganda 1999:4). This condition demands university students to possess critical reading skill. It is to avoid themselves specifically and Indonesian people in general from being manipulated and becoming 'victim' of certain ideologies and interests of political

elites, the institutions of newspaper or the news writer in the name of freedom, democracy and reformation upholding.

Many reading theorists believe in the importance of critical reading skill. According to McWhorter (1992:243), people tend to be much more tolerant and accepting in reading. Many readers readily accept information and ideas presented in written form without careful evaluation. Obviously, this passive attitude endangers the readers themselves especially when they deal with political news. She suggests that the readers must be critical in reading starting with the full awareness that everything they read, particularly political news in this case, must be written from a particular perspective; thus, the writer's subjective opinion, value, attitude and ideology are implicitly and explicitly recorded in it. For there are always chances for a writer to be biased, Milan (1983:185) also strongly argues that it is not enough for the readers to have only a good fundamental ability to comprehend well without having the ability to develop critical sense, that is a means of judging the worth of what is being read. Another claim of critical reading is also given by Fowler (1996:11). Believing that biases always exist and that there can never be genuine neutrality or a clear un-distorting window of fact or truth mediation or representation, he highlights that the readers have to read carefully and comparatively in order to discount the biases and see through to the truth. He further reminds the need of massive educational advances to produce critical readers who could discount the bias. Moreover, Goatly (2000:159) emphasizes that only by having self resistance and challenging the writer's beliefs

and assumptions all the time in reading that the readers could maintain enough sense of belonging to remain mentally healthy.

Critical reading believes that a text interpretation is made by the readers themselves. Thus, critical reading regards the readers as active readers who actively understand and evaluate the text they read. Critical reading assigns the readers to continuously question the ideas presented in the news by recognizing the writer's purposes, noting special point of view, being aware of the choice of language, and evaluating argument and inferences. Critical readers do not unquestioningly accept everything they read just because it is in print or reject a writer's idea simply because they dislike or disagree with what he says or the way he says it, but they must be able to form their own opinion, ideas and judgments (Milan 1983:185). Only by reading critically can the readers keep themselves 'sane', not merely feel and do what the writer wants them to feel and do.

Being totally aware of the importance of university students to have good skill in reading critically, especially in reading political news, the researcher attempts to conduct a study investigating to what extent the Widya Mandala Catholic University S1 students can read Indonesian political news critically. This study involves the seventh semester students from nine faculties / departments. The researcher hopes that the findings of her study can be taken by all concerned people especially the curriculum makers of language to consider and justify the importance of the teaching of critical reading besides the teaching of reading comprehension.

1.2 Statements of the Problem

This study is done to question the following points:

1. To what extent can Widya Mandala University S1 students read Indonesian political news critically?

Devine (1981:103-110) states that reading critically skill includes the ability in recognizing the writer's purposes, the ability in noting special point of view, the ability in being aware of the writer's choice of language, the ability in evaluating the writer's argument and the ability in evaluating inferences. Based on this consideration, the statement of the problem number one above is elaborated into the following minor statements of the problem:

1.1 To what extent can Widya Mandala University S1 students recognize the writer's purposes?

1.1.1 To what extent can Widya Mandala University S1 students recognize the writer's stated purpose?

1.1.2 To what extent can Widya Mandala University S1 students recognize the writer's unstated purpose?

1.2 To what extent can the Widya Mandala University S1 students note special point of view?

1.2.1 To what extent can Widya Mandala University S1 students identify irrelevant information?

1.2.2 To what extent can Widya Mandala University S1 students identify the writer's opinion?

- 1.3 To what extent can Widya Mandala University S1 students be aware of the writer's choice of language?
- 1.4 To what extent can Widya Mandala University S1 students evaluate the writer's argument?
- 1.5 To what extent can Widya Mandala University S1 students evaluate inferences?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the statements of the problems, this study is done with the following objectives:

1. To describe to what extent Widya Mandala University S1 students can read Indonesian political news critically.
 - 1.1 To describe to what extent Widya Mandala University S1 students can recognize the writer's purposes.
 - 1.1.1 To describe to what extent Widya Mandala University S1 students can recognize the writer's stated purpose.
 - 1.1.2 To describe to what extent Widya Mandala University S1 students can recognize the writer's unstated purpose.
 - 1.2 To describe to what extent Widya Mandala University S1 students can note special point of view.
 - 1.2.1 To describe to what extent Widya Mandala University S1 students can identify irrelevant information.
 - 1.2.2 To describe to what extent Widya Mandala University S1 students can identify the writer's opinion.

1.3 To describe to what extent Widya Mandala University S1 students can be aware of the writers' choice of language.

1.4 To describe to what extent Widya Mandala University S1 students can evaluate the writer's argument.

1.5 To describe to what extent Widya Mandala University S1 students can evaluate inferences.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks of this study are the theory of critical reading skill and the theory of Indonesian political news.

1.4.1 Critical Reading Skill

Critical reading skill is based on the fact that news can never be free from biases or be the genuine neutrality or a clean un-distorting window of facts. It believes that it is not enough for readers to have a good fundamental ability to comprehend well without the ability to develop critical sense. Practically, readers need critical reading skill to continuously question, evaluate and judge the worth of what they read. According to Devine (1981: 103-110), critical reading skill includes five abilities. Those five abilities are (1) the ability in recognizing the writer's purposes, which is specified into the ability in recognizing the writer's stated and unstated purposes, (2) the ability in noting special point of view, which is divided into the ability in identifying irrelevant information and the ability in identifying the writer's opinion, (3) the ability in recognizing the writer's choice

of language, (4) the ability in evaluating the writer's argument and (5) the ability in evaluating inferences.

1.4.2 Indonesian Political News

Researches done by Sudiby (2001) have found that Indonesian political news contained biases. It tended to include subjective judgments, personal emotion and one sidedness. Some news also explicitly stated instructive statement that reflected personal opinion. The information in the news was often found unbalanced. It did not cover both sides of the story. On the contrary, there was a tendency that the information was mainly collected from the sources having the same beliefs and ideas. Many times, the sources did not have direct connection to the issues. Thus, the news depended on psychological facts more than sociological facts, which of course weakened the analysis and the argument itself. The language in the news was also found vulgar and sarcastic. Hyperbolic and metaphoric language was often used to dramatize situation. Some special key terms were deliberately chosen to influence the public by making them unconsciously relate the issues to the other irrelevant topics that may arouse their emotion. There was a lack of field investigation and information crosschecking. Based on these findings, Indonesian political news cannot be considered as the mere presentation of the political facts or events, but also the presentation of accusation, suspicions and subjective judgments.

1.5 The Assumptions

The study is conducted based on the following assumptions:

1. The subjects of this study have the skill in reading political news critically.
2. The subjects' skill in reading political news critically can be measured.
3. The subjects of this study are the seventh semester students who possess all the qualities of being the seventh semester students according to their faculties / departments.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is obviously worth doing for at least two purposes. It hopes to give the newsmakers an illustration on the condition of the university students in reading their news. It also wishes to remind all newsmakers that their news somehow results in any consequences, which may not all be good. The findings of this study, therefore, are expected to encourage all newsmakers to have a new better perspective and to broaden their mind in producing their news.

A more important purpose of conducting this study is to propose the teaching of critical reading in all levels of education. Especially in the spirit of new freedom, reformation and democracy in Indonesia, where everyone has the right to write out his thought, ideas, opinions and emotions and then spread them, it is very crucial especially for university students as a potential political power to be critical in reading political news to avoid being manipulated and provoked. This critical reading skill is to enable the university students to prevent themselves from being influenced and used by the others and to enable them to take their own

stance, to think clearly on an issue and to form their own ideas and thought based on strong arguments and evidences. However, this skill to take critical stance is not innate but have to be learned from the earliest age (Devine 1981:98-99). Unfortunately, the potentiality of the teaching of reading that also gives considerable concentration on the criticality aspect has not been fully explored in Indonesia. In fact, the teaching of reading has so far been focused on the students' ability to comprehend a text. The students are taught to be able to answer the reading comprehension questions well but are not much encouraged to read critically. Based on this consideration, this study intends to highlight the importance of the teaching of critical reading skill.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

This study is limitedly done to investigate the skill in reading political news critically covering the ability in recognizing the news writer's purposes, noting special point of view, being aware of the news writers' choices of language, evaluating the writers' opinion, and evaluating inferences.

The political news on which the students will perform their skill in reading critically is also under certain limitations. First, the three pieces of political news used in this study contain all expected elements enabling the students to perform their five critical reading abilities. However, it is impossible to find three pieces of political news that contain exactly the same numbers of the expected elements. Second, the three pieces of political news used in this study are in Indonesian. This is to make sure that the students will not get difficulty in understanding the

news in term of language. Thus, they can focus themselves in reading critically. The three pieces of Indonesian political news are taken from Jawa Post Newspaper (October 5th, 2002 and October 6th, 2002) and Surya Newspaper (November 2nd, 2002).

The subjects of this study are limited to the Widya Mandala University S1 students of semester seven. The choosing of university students is based on the consideration that they represent a potential political power that is very capable of bringing political changes. The history has shown that many political movements and actions have been motivated, motored and done by the university students, such as the proclamation of Indonesia Independence Day until the most recent students movement in 1998 (Kasih & Suganda 1999:4). University students are also considered intellectual people that are very sensitive to the political issues. However, this study is limited on the seventh semester students because the students of this semester are assumed to have more experiences in reading political news and have acquired better critical sense compared to the students from the previous semesters. Widya Mandala University is deliberately chosen as the place where the study is conducted. This is because as an educational practitioner graduated from Widya Mandala University, the researcher wants to give contribution to the quality improvement of her alumni. Due to the tight academic schedule, not all of the seventh semester students of Widya Mandala were available. The subject of this study was selected using convenient sampling. Thus, the results of this study might not be generalized to the whole population.

1.8 Definitions of Key Terms

Critical Reading Skill refers to the reader's capability in performing the abilities in recognizing the writers' purpose, noting the writer's special point of view, being aware of the writers' choices of language, evaluating the writers' argument, and evaluating the writer's conclusion while reading in order to actively question and judge the worth of the text being read (Devine, 1981: 103-110).

Indonesian Political News refers to the written representation of political event in the Indonesian newspapers. By this, it is also meant the news, which is represented in Indonesian.

1.9 Organization of the Study

The report of this study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter gives the background of the study. The second chapter provides the related literature that explains and supports this study. Chapter three discusses the methodology of the study. The results of this study and their interpretation, however, will be presented in chapter four. Finally, chapter five gives the summary of the study and some suggestions.