

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Background of the study**

Vocabulary plays an important role in language learning. Although the four language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing are always in the top places in English learning, the components of language, especially vocabulary cannot be left behind. Those four skills of language would not exist if there were no any vocabularies.

Vocabulary is knowledge of words and word meanings (Lehr, Osborn and Hiebert, 2005). Lehr, Osborn and Hiebert (2005) classified vocabulary into two types: receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. Receptive vocabularies are the words that we know when we see or hear them, mostly from reading or from listening. Whereas productive vocabularies are the words that we comfortably produce when we speak or write. People own larger size of receptive vocabulary than productive vocabulary size (Webb, 2008) because people learn vocabulary first before they can produce words in their writing and speaking.

Based on the frequency of word, Nation (2001) divided vocabulary into three main groups: high frequency words in General Service List (GSL) by West (1953) which contain 2000 word families in English, the academic vocabulary lately known as Academic Word List (AWL) by Coxhead (2000), and a technical vocabulary which differs by subject area. High frequency words in GSL are divided into two parts, the first most frequent 1000 word families of English and

the second most frequent 1000 word families of English. Mastering the West's GSL, allows readers to comprehend 80% of the average text (Nation in Spiri, 2005). AWL contains 570 word families and covers approximately 10% of the total words token in academic text. AWL was compiled from a corpus of 3.5 millions running words of written academic texts by examining the range and frequency of words outside the 2000 most frequently words (Coxhead, 2000). AWL is a need for students who study in higher education since AWL contains academic words that widely appear in academic textbooks and journals. Schmitt (2010) added that AWL supports readers to read academic topics. Because AWL is designed for students in higher education; therefore, AWL is essential for students of Graduate Program.

Students studying in the Graduate Program have to master the AWL in order to fulfill their needs in dealing with academic matters. To confront the academic matters the students should also own high language literacy. Describing the students' language literacy, Wells in Mckay (1993) delineated four levels of literacy from the lowest level to the highest level: the performative, the functional, the informative, and the epistemic. Wells in Mckay (1993) asserted that epistemic level identifies students as academically educated. Graduate students should have reached the epistemic level to deal with academic matters, i.e. note taking, paraphrasing experts' thought, summarizing main idea of a text, making reports, and writing papers. These academic activities are the ones that the students of Magister Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris (MPBI) of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya (WMCU) should do.

To enter the program of MPBI of WMCU Surabaya, candidates, among others, have to graduate from the undergraduate program with the minimum GPA of 2.75, pass the written entrance test and interview held by MPBI, and/or they must hold Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score of 550. Moreover, the candidates, whose background education is not related to English education, are obligated to follow matriculation course before the academic year started (Pedoman Akademik 2009-2010 Program Pascasarjana Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya). The prerequisite assumes that the candidates have high level of proficiency in English usage and academic vocabulary.

In MPBI of WMCU the students read, speak, listen and write academic matters with a major topic area of English Language Teaching (ELT). The academic activities conducted in the classroom are presentation, discussion, note taking and workshop. In MPBI, there are academic writing activities that should be done by the students. They have to write reviews or critical writings, summarize the topic discussion of classrooms' presentation, and write papers for final projects.

In academic writing, according to Swales and Feak (2001), the students need to be sure that they communicate using appropriate writing style. Further they argued that the vocabulary shift or the choice of words is the most salient features. In line with that, Using English for Academic Purpose (UEfAP) (2010) mentioned eight main features of academic writing, one of them is accuracy (<http://www.uefap.com/writing/feature/intro.htm>). Accuracy requires writers to use correct and accurate vocabulary so that the writing is not confusing. Academic

writing precision of language is an absolute requirement, which also means that word choice is crucial (Wilkinson, 1991). Therefore, the students must have sufficient vocabulary knowledge to write papers using the target language.

Coxhead (2000) differentiated academic writing from everyday writing in terms of academic words. The content of academic papers should inform readers a certain topic of facts and personal ideas, with the bigger portion of facts. The AWL in the students' papers can be raised by the students themselves in their claim, assertion, and supportive statement or can be derived from the experts, for example from quotation, summary or reporting verb. Based on the standard discovered by Coxhead (2000), academic papers must contain academic words at least 10% of the total words used.

The previous study done by Therestian Vandra (2007) investigated the student's First 1000 High Frequency Words (MFW-K1) or the first 1000 frequent words of West's GSL in expressing and writing their ideas on academic issue. The result showed that the students' mastery of the MFW-K1 was adequate. Vandra's research focused on the vocabulary but not the AWL, the MFW-K1 was the vocabulary that mainly exist in all kinds of texts not academic texts. The AWL is naturally receptive. There was a big question whether the students of the Graduate Program could use academic words they comprehended. This question is important since the students of the Graduate Program have to apply the AWL in their work. The students of Graduate program need to use the academic words in their papers writing not in loose sentences. Hariyanto (2012) investigated the MPBI students' receptive and productive vocabulary in his research, however the

application of the productive vocabulary was in loose sentences. The result showed that the students' mastery of academic words is not yet sufficient, since there was only one student passed the academic word category. In this research the writer investigated the MPBI students' productive vocabulary, especially in writing skill by focusing on the AWL.

### **1.2 The Research Questions**

Considering the background of this study, the questions investigated in this study are:

1. What kinds of AWL were found in the students' academic project papers?
2. To what extent did the MPBI students use AWL in their academic project papers?
3. To what extent did the MPBI students' academic background and English exposures affect the using of AWL in their academic project papers?

### **1.3 The Purpose of the Study**

Derived from the research questions above, this study was mainly intended to describe whether the MPBI students have master the AWL. Specifically this research investigated:

1. The kinds of AWL in MPBI students' project papers.
2. The percentages of AWL in MPBI students' academic project paper.

3. The students' background and habits affected the using of AWL in their academic project paper.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Framework**

This research was conducted in order to find out the academic words used in the academic project paper. This study was based on the theory of Vocabulary, Academic Words, and Academic Writing.

Vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings (Lehr, Osborn and Hiebert, 2005). People cannot communicate to each other if they do not have any vocabularies. Vocabulary is very useful to express someone's ideas or thoughts both in spoken and written. There are kinds of vocabulary to choose in writing, the informal and the formal one depending on the purpose of the writing. In writing academic papers, people are obliged to use academic words.

Academic word is a word that is used in academic field at university level and above by educated people (Uribe, 2008). The academic word refers to the formal vocabulary, which must be mastered by the university students or above. Coxhead (2000) compiled the formal words widely used in academic textbooks and journals named Academic Word List (AWL). AWL should appear in the graduate students' papers as their papers belong to academic writing.

Academic writing is the result of an activity to express one's idea in a written form in which academic words are used. The purpose of academic writing is to present information that demonstrates the writer's understanding of the subject written (<http://www.gailadamsreading.com/qanda.html>). In writing

academic papers, the students express written information among others through academic words.

### **1.5 The Significance of the Study**

The results of the study are expected to give useful contribution to MPBI program. The study may provide beneficial information about academic words in academic writing. Hopefully, the results of the study can help the MPBI in syllabus making.

### **1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The subjects of this research were the MPBI students of WMCU who have been studying academic writing class and had done the academic project papers. The students were still taking some lectures actively.

This researched analyzed the students' project papers in terms of academic words listed in AWL. The academic words were analyzed by the help of a computer program named Web Vocabulary Profilers English version 3 created by Tom Cobb (2011) which could be accessed online in <http://www.lex Tutor.ca.vp/>.

### **1.7 Assumptions**

This study was based on the following assumptions:

- a. The MPBI students read academic textbooks, journals, and papers which contain academic words.
- b. The MPBI students wrote academic papers to fulfill their project papers.

## 1.8 The Definitions of Key Terms

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

- **Word** is the smallest unit of Linguistics which can stand alone in writing or speech.
- **Token** is the individual unit of words
- **Academic Word** is formal word that is used by educated people in university level and above.
- **Academic Word List (AWL)** is a list of 570 word families that are mostly found in academic texts.
- **Academic Word Profile** is a written description of the academic words (belong to AWL) of the students' papers
- **Vocabulary Profilers** is a computer program that performs lexical text analysis created by Tom Cobb.
- **Academic Writing** is a kind of writing that should be managed by the students in higher education.

## 1.9 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one discusses the introduction of this study, followed by chapter two, which conveys some related literatures that support the writer's study, and chapter three deals with the methodology of the study conducted by the writer. Meanwhile chapter four presents the results of data analysis and discussion of the findings and the last chapter, chapter five, presents conclusion and some suggestions.