CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background of the Study

Communication and information are two things that play a very important role in the existence of human beings. People always share and exchange information in their life. The reason is that they need each other for their survival. Knowledge is built through the exchange of information which is vital to a new understanding of life itself. In everyday life people will always give and receive information of various kinds. There can be information about science and technology. For instance, news about the latest developments in science and technology is published in the electronic and print media. Readers can easily see and understand how people have progressed in their life to achieve a better living standard. Some other information is about social activities. As social beings, people should interact with each other. They need sympathy, support or encouragement to face the reality of life. In all, communication can never be separated from human existence.

Communication takes place in different modes. The information given or received can be transmitted through a medium such as a printed matter. Journals, magazines and newspapers, for instance, contain the information needed by the readers. There is communication between the writer (sender of information) the reader (recipient of information). In another situation, communication can be performed face to face (F2F). A speaker will tell what is to be shared in life; a

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listener will get the information and respond to the speaker. Thus, there will be a conversation in which the interlocutors (speaker and listener at the same time) share and exchange information. The most important thing in this case is not necessarily the content of the talk but rather the interaction that takes place between the interlocutors. Conversation is a form of speaking in which two or more people are involved in a social interaction that leads to the understanding of life. The speaker may show the skill of telling or informing the listener in the conversation. It is common knowledge that not everyone can be a good conversationalist. The art of speaking is important to make the conversation go as expected. It is quite easy to notice whether a conversation is enjoyable or not. When the speaker cannot continue the conversation to some extent, it can be concluded that s/he is not an effective speaker.

Speaking as one of the four basic language skills is not easy to perform. The reason is obvious. It has a purpose which can affect the efficiency of communication. The purpose, for instance, can be to tell, inform, command, request, explain, share information and many other functions of language. The speaking act is then considered to be a speech act that influences the interlocutors.

When two people speak to each other, they can perform an interactive communication called a conversation. One can give some information to his speaking partner who then responds to the request of the first speaker. There can be an exchange of information depending on the similar motive of the two speakers. The conversation is said to be successful when the two partners can

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understand each other in the sense that they know when to begin, wait for the right time to respond and end the conversation.

Conversation is now regarded as a very important skill of speaking that a language program should include it as one of the major features of speaking. In the process of conducting the communication, the interlocutors are supposed to know what is relevant to their talk. Communication occurs when the two interlocutors understand each other. Apart from the language grammar mastery, communication requires extra knowledge (knowledge of the world) about a topic being discussed. In mastering English, for instance, the interlocutors are required to understand the culture of the language. Their ability can be tested through a special test, i.e, Test Of English for International Communication (TOEIC) as an example of how important the speaking skill is. In the test, for example, the participants are asked to discuss a topic which is understood by each other. Pictures can be the sources of information for them to begin the conversation. Very often, the test takers will get confused when they are presented with situations that are different from their culture.

The ability to converse with another person requires some knowledge of linguistic and non-linguistic competence. When a speaker chooses a certain topic which is not familiar to the other, then there will be a breakdown of communication. The other speaker does not understand the topic because it is beyond his knowledge. In other words, someone cannot be a good conversationalist if he has no knowledge required by the occasion. An engineer will prefer to choose the topic about engines which are not familiar to a doctor. If

the two want to exchange information, they should talk about something familiar like social activities which they attend. In a party, for instance, it can be observed how a conversation is carried out. The guests and host may greet each other for the social interaction. There will be a time when they start a conversation through the signals in the language. When two people have the same common background about a topic, they can develop the conversation into a more intimate interaction. Very often the people in a party or any interactive situation have to choose their partners in speaking because they are afraid of being unable to perform the conversation well.

It is a reality that before having the conversation, one speaker may try to figure out if the person he is going to talk to can be an equal partner in the talk. This is a kind of prejudice. When there is a feeling of certainty as expressed in self-confidence and security as seen in the comforting experience, then, the speaker will have enough courage to approach the other person to start the conversation.

This situation is commonly acknowledged in Indonesia particularly when English as a foreign language is used as a medium of interaction. A native speaker of English perhaps wants to continue a conversation with his partner who is a local Indonesian speaker until he finds out that there is a gap between them. The gap is felt when the native speaker cannot grasp what is meant by the local speaker. There is what is called a "culture bump" between the two interlocutors (Jiang, 2001:382). The use of precise vocabulary to express meaning is an essential aspect of the conversation.

A native Indonesian who has learnt the grammar is not necessarily a good speaker of Indonesian. Similarly, even though he has mastered English grammar, he probably cannot speak English well as in the way he continues the conversation to satisfy the curiosity of the other speaker and uses appropriate expressions to describe how he feels about a certain thing and what he thinks of the other speaker's ideas. It can be assumed that mastering the English grammar is not a guarantee for a successful and satisfactory conversation.

Thus, according to Tannen (1994), there are five factors that intervene with the ability to perform a conversation in English such as: 1) *The genre or special jargons* where the speaker should know how to choose the genre of the language in relation to a particular occasion. The setting or place, for example, can influence the speaker to choose the formal or informal style. In a church, the speaker will have to use formal language in the conversation, 2) *The culture of the language*, i.e, the understanding of the native speaker's culture should also be considered in order to perform a communicative conversation. On many occasions, the local Indonesian speaker makes mistakes in telling what he means to say. Certain expressions cannot be translated into Indonesian at all. The cultural expressions can be a source of confusion when they are not understood well. There are utterances which are untranslatable in conversations. Hesitations like "well, hm, uh-huh, wow, well, yeah and so on are commonly found in a daily conversation, 3) *The thinking process of the speaker* where especially when culture is involved, it can be said that the way of thinking is relevant to be discussed. The thinking process or thinking pattern implies that a speaker may

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perceive some ideas differently. For example, the research about the use of compliments has shown that Asian people have a different way to respond to the expression of compliment "Thank you". Some speakers will give a different response to the compliment such as " You are beautiful". It is popularly known that Asian people will respond in this way: 1) You are beautiful, too, 2) I have no money to give you, and 3) You are just kidding. From these responses, it can be concluded that even a compliment may be interpreted as an insincere one and so there is some suspicion about its truth. The thinking pattern involves the way the information is perceived. When one speaker jumps from one topic to another, it can be assumed that the speaker describes things generally (deductive). It means that there can be many topics which require more general information. On the other hand, another speaker may discuss one topic in depth (inductive). The speaker will just describe all the relevant information about the topic, 4) *The educational background* where the speaker who has more knowledge about a topic tends to dominate the conversation because he always has a response to a stimulus. It can be seen from the everyday life that a highly-educated speaker will show off his knowledge in the conversation thus making the topic more interesting and challenging, 5) *The social status or relation* in which the speaker who feels that he is much older can claim that he deserves the respect from a younger speaker. Thus, politeness is required more. The joke stating that "a rich man's story is always funny" can be accepted as the true nature of conversation. When the speaker is too aware of his status in terms of social standing, there will be a problem of self-confidence in dealing with the information exchanged.

This difference can be detected when the two speakers get confused. The thinking pattern actually influences the speaker to choose appropriate expressions. A dialog from an Indonesian textbook can show the deductive thinking applied in composing the dialog. When speaker A jumps from one topic to another, this is called the general or deductive pattern (Iseminger,1968). In contrast, the inductive thinking pattern will focus on the same topic by giving all relevant information. In a dialog commonly used in Senior High School (Sekolah Menengah Atas: SMA) textbooks, for instance, this deductive thinking is often applied. When speaker B asks speaker A about the health after an exchange of greetings, the next question will be a different one requiring different information.

Of the given factors, the main one for the research is the thinking process of the speaker. This is based on the writer's observation over the Indonesian people who have to use English in their conversation. The fact that many people in this country cannot speak English fluently has intrigued the writer to discuss more about the nature of conversation in terms of thinking processes. He himself has talked with many native speakers and found out why he often gets stuck in continuing a conversation. He has realized that there must be something that influences the fluency.

A fluent speaker must have read a lot of books about a topic and so he can elaborate on the topic rising during a conversation. The Indonesian speaker has little information about a single topic and so he prefers to choose the topic so that the conversation can go on. An Indonesian speaker reads a little and is not very curious about an event. As a result, he is satisfied with what he knows without

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ever arguing and wondering if there is more to learn. For the speaker, any topic can be discussed as long as it is interesting. There is no differentiation about choosing a topic. On the other hand, the native speaker of English will first satisfy his curiosity about a topic. Thus, the content of conversation is a matter of the number of topics for an Indonesian speaker while for the native speaker it is the amount of relevant information about one topic (Tannen,1984).

This research attempts to discover the thinking processes as applied by students or speakers of English in their conversations. It is obvious from the writer's observation and experiences in dealing with speakers of English that the speakers choose a certain kind of thinking process in expressing their ideas, opinions, and feelings. Therefore, it can be assumed that a thinking process can influence the fluency or speed of delivery in making a conversation more enjoyable and interesting. It is through this research that he can show or explain why some people are not fluent conversationalists. The application of a thinking process or pattern plays a major role in conducting a successful and communicative conversation.

1.2 The Problem of the Study

Based on the explanation given in the background, the problems of the study are formulated in the following questions:

1. *What kind of thinking process is applied by Grade XII students of SMA Sutomo 1, Medan in conducting a conversation in English?*

2. *How do the thinking processes occur in the conversation?*

3. Why do these processes occur in English conversation?

4. How should students be encouraged to speak in English more fluently based on their given thinking process?

1.3 The Objective of the Study

This study is an attempt to find the kind of thinking process as applied by the students or speakers in conducting a conversation in English. The application of the thinking process can be proved in the analysis of the spoken and written language data. The spoken data consist of recorded conversations and the written data are taken from samples of conversations in textbooks used by the students.

1.4. The Scope of the Study

.The thinking processes are concerned with the way speakers express themselves through choice of information which is essential in conducting a conversation in English. In the interaction, the speakers have to deal with a topic maintenance or a topic shifting so that they can maintain their fluency. When there is a topic change, then there is an application of a thinking process. The number of topics can tell how speakers actually use English for communication. If the amount of information and number of topics are analyzed, there must be a difference of thinking process being applied.

In the deductive pattern, for instance, there will be more different topics and general information given. When the two speakers focus on one topic and suddenly change to another topic which is not closely related to the previous

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topic, it can be said that they express general information. On the other hand, when the two speakers focus on one topic with more detailed information, then there is the application of inductive thinking process. It should be clear that in the exchanged information there can be many topics. Therefore, the analysis must show the types of topics discussed based on the kind of information given during a conversation.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

The findings in this research will theoretically and practically bring benefit to those who want to improve their English speaking skills by understanding how to apply a thinking process. Teachers and students in general can also learn the problems of conducting a communicative conversation and so there will be no breakdown of communication. The conversation writers can also take advantage of the research findings in order to design a "real life" conversations based on daily experiences.

1.6 The Assumptions

A conversation as an exchange of information can be analyzed by using the thinking process of the speakers. Therefore, the study is based on the following assumptions:

1. The students apply a thinking process in conducting a conversation in English.

2. The students understand that they should think of what they are going to say.

3. A thinking process is related to the nature of conversation itself

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