CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Background of the Study

Listening, writing, speaking, and reading are the four major language skills needed to be mastered by students. For English learners, reading comprehension problems have been a popular issue for a long time. According to Vogel (1998), as referenced by Chen and Chen (2015), roughly 52 percent of adults with L2 reading comprehension issues struggled to acquire a foreign language. There are three levels of comprehension when it comes to reading comprehension. Brassel (2008:17-18) mentioned three standards of comprehension are literal Comprehension (concerning identifying information and ideas stated explicitly in the text), inferential comprehension (taking information that is inferred or implied in a text), and critical comprehension (making critical judgments about the details contained in the text). From the standards that have been described above, it can be seen that in reading comprehension, learners cannot answer the reading comprehension questions without comprehending the text itself, since most question items in reading comprehension tests require them to do so. Therefore, text difficulty does matter in reading comprehension and English learners must truly comprehend the text to figure out the answer in reading comprehension.

Researches such as Sholichatun, (2011), Vinh to (2013), Sari (2016), Ramadhan (2017), and Manurung (2019) which adopted the theory of lexical density to discover the level of difficulty in written materials highlight that the

sentences with high lexical density will be more difficult or complicated than the sentences with low lexical density. In the study from Khamahani (2015) even described the parameters level of lexical density in reading material difficulty. The range of lexical density was described in 0.40 – 0.70 (40% - 70%) with 0.40 – 0.50 (40% - 50%) was categorized as low lexical density level, 0.51 – 0.59 (51% - 59%) was categorized as medium lexical density level, and 0.60 – 0.70 (60% - 70%) was categorized as high lexical density level.

Meanwhile, there is another theory that encourages to doubt of the previous statement related to lexical density towards text difficulties. According to Baru (2009: 78), 72% of his respondents said that their difficulties in reading English were due to linguistic issues. Their lack of linguistic abilities hampered their capacity to comprehend English text. According to his studies, the reading problems caused by linguistic problems included phonology, semantics, syntactic structure, and lexical or vocabulary.

Besides that, linguistic factors are not the only aspects of whether a text is difficult to read or not. Besides lexical density as one of the linguistic factors, non-linguistic factors also play an important role in causing a text to be difficult to be read and understand. According to Kasim and Raisha (2017), English learners encountered a number of reading comprehension problems, both linguistic and non-linguistic. The non-linguistic factors which were most interfered with the participants included lack of cultural knowledge, poor word recognition skills, a lack of background knowledge, a lack of or improper use strategy, and other psychological factors.

To see whether the lexical density of text in the reading comprehension test is one-factor affecting reading test difficulty, both simple and multiple correlation analysis was conducted. Multiple correlation analysis is well known as correlation which meant seeing the relationship between three or more variables (two or more independent variables and one dependent variable). according to Ridwan (2012:238), multiple correlations are a coefficient that gives a strong influence or correlation between two or more variables simultaneously with other variables.

The other urgency to see the correlation is coming from the tendency of teachers in Indonesia who utilize textbooks and worksheets as the main sources in teaching-learning activity including designing the tests. Adi (2016) reveals that textbooks and worksheets are used as the main source in the learning process. one of the rationalizations of the teachers taking this action is because the local English teachers is not familiar with the term of lexical density.

To see the percentage of the lexical density of text choosen in the reading comprehension test designed by the teacher, Preliminary data had been taken by the researcher from students' previous final examination test of 10th grade of SMA Swasta Dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo in the year academic 2019/2020. There were two texts in their final reading comprehension test. The first text was entitled "Malin Kundang" and the second one was "B.J. Habibie". The data of lexical density percentage for each reading text was displayed in the following table.

Table 1. 1 The Data of Lexical Density in Final Exam Reading Text 2019

No	Title of reading text	Grammatical Words	Lexical words	Total words	Percentage of lexical density
1	Malin Kundang	244	283	527	53.7
2	B.J. Habibie	188	311	499	62.32

From table 1.1 above the highest lexical density percentage was the text of 'B.J. Habibie', 62.32%. and the lowest was the text of 'Malin Kundang', 53.7%. Each of the texts in the reading comprehension test from the previous class at 10th grade of SMA Swasta Dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo for the year academic 2019/2020 was considerably had a high percentage of lexical density. Considering the lexical density percentages of text in their reading comprehension test, it could be assumed that students at the 10th grade of SMA Swasta Dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo were quite challenged to maximize their time accomplishing that final examination since the reading texts were considered as difficult texts.

based on the rationale which was also supported by Kasim and Raisha (2017), the factors that cause a text to be difficult to be read or difficult to be understand can come from both linguistic factors (Phonology, semantics, syntactic structure, lexical and vocabulary problems) and non-linguistic factors (lack of cultural knowledge, poor word recognition skills, a lack of background knowledge, improper reading strategy, and other psychological factors) that encouraged the researcher to doubt statement related to the lexical density towards text difficulties and tried to dig it deeper to find the empirical evidence by finding the relationship

between lexical density and the difficulty of the text in the reading comprehension test.

B. The Problem of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the problem of the study which the writer would like to analyze is: Does the lexical density of reading text correlate to the reading comprehension test validity?

C. The Objective of the study

In the relation to the problem, the objective of this analysis is to find out if lexical density significantly correlates and contributes to the validity of the reading comprehension test.

D. The Scope of the Study

Related to the problem and the scope of the study, the researcher has to limit the scope of the study to get through analysis and relevant data. It will focus to:

1. Correlate the lexical density only with reading texts in the reading comprehension test, not the lexical density in the question items. Since the main purpose of the study is to find out if lexical density significantly contributes to reading comprehension difficulty, not evaluating the student's reading skills.

2. Utilize Ure's formula to analyze the lexical density of the text. Since the researcher need to analyze the text based on the original method of lexical density proposed by Ure

E. The Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is divided into two parts, they are theoretically and practically.

1. Theoretically

    This study will enrich and strengthen the understanding of Lexical Density theory and give a contribution to test validity as one of the principles in language assessment.

2. Practically

    a. The Teacher

        This research gives benefit for the teacher as a reference on how to use, select, adapt, or design reading comprehension test from the perspective of the text complexity itself.

    b. The Students

        This research is hoping to give advantages for the students to get more familiar with the TOEFL test as the standardized test, especially in the reading comprehension section.

    c. The Other Researchers

        For other researchers, this research is expected to be useful as a reference for further research especially for future researchers who have an interest in this kind of study.