

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

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The global development towards the 21<sup>st</sup> century which is characterized by the advancement in science and technology with all their impacts on every walk of life, has made us conscious of the importance of language as a tool for global communication. The advancement in information technology has caused almost all existing phenomena in the globe to become transparent and interrelated so that interaction among nations have become stronger and stronger. The closeness of the interaction among nations, popularly known as “The global village”, has prompted the function of a foreign language to become very significant. This fact brings the teaching and learning of a foreign language to a very important position in the community.

English as a language which is used internationally or globally has been taught in almost all countries in the world. It has become the language which is most frequently used in international trade, diplomacy and tourism and that it is studied by more and more people than any other languages. English is also one of the most important means for acquiring access to the world's intellectual and technical resources. In other words, it can be said that English is a library language, the medium of science, technology and international trade, and as a contact language among nations and parts of nations around the world.

In Indonesia, English as a foreign language is a compulsory subject to be taught in all schools from lower to upper secondary schools and also universities. Even in

some private elementary schools, English is offered as an elective subject. However, the proficiency in English of the Indonesian students still shows unsatisfactory quality of the outputs. The unsatisfying quality of education in general and English in particular in Indonesia, of course, relates to various variables. On one hand, the variables may come from the methods that teachers use in teaching English to their students, while on the other hand, it may come from the students themselves. In other cases, the supporting infra and supra structures of an educational institution will greatly influence the success of teaching and learning processes.

There are many factors to be considered and steps to be undertaken for the future betterment of the teaching-learning process and the development of the quality of human resources. Among the many aspects of the teaching-learning process, it might be that the strategies applied are not appropriate. The use of strategy or strategies in learning can result a better output. One of the strategies is Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) which has been shown in some studies as one of the factors behind the success in learning a language (Wenden and Rubin, 1987; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1993; Cohen, 1990). So, in this case it might be a right solution to apply the strategy that can be used by the students.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Learning is an on-going process in life. The sayings "learning starts from the cradle till it is time to die," is true. In every walk of life, learning takes place whether it is formal, non formal, or informal. To be a successful person, one should learn. "What", "why", and "how" to learn in order to be the one who can lead a better life

can be said to be an individual choice. This implies that to be successful, the three aspects should be covered. If the “what” and “why” are clear, the “how” is the most important thing. In this respect, a learner tends to apply a certain strategy in his/her learning processes. This is especially true in the attempt to study English as an international language. English as a means of communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, should be well-mastered by the students as well as the speakers of English.

In the mastery of the four language skills in English (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) where grammar resides in the four, a wise student will certainly apply a strategy or strategies. S/he should be able to approach the learning of English through the application of one or two or perhaps as many strategies as appropriately used. There are a number of LLSs available and some of them are over-lapping. In this study, some of the LLSs would be discussed and eventually one would especially be focussed as used in this present study.

LLSs have received much attention since the late 1970s. Reiss (1985) reports that during the past decade, the emphasis on foreign language research had shifted from the teacher to the learner and educational research had identified a number of factors that account for some of the differences in how students learn. However, Harlow (1988) insists that although the instructional process involves both teacher and learner, the bulk of research efforts throughout the history of education have centred upon teaching techniques, while neglecting the importance of the learner himself. As Rubin (1975) argues, many foreign language teachers are so concerned with finding the best method or with getting the correct answer that they fail to attend to the learning process. The method used by a teacher is not the only factor to create

successful learners. The learners themselves must also take their part in order to get satisfying results in their learning. One of the steps learners can take to improve their learning performance is by acknowledging their own strategies in the learning process.

The investigation of LLSs has advanced the understanding of the processes learners use to develop their skills in a second or foreign language. There are four main skills in language learning, namely: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Beyond the four language skills, there is another skill which is quite crucial in learning language, that is grammar as Brown (1994) argues that grammar is one of the aspects which operates language. Oxford (1990) asserts that grammar is also a language skill and it intersects and overlaps with the four other language skills in particular ways. In Indonesian schools, the term 'Structure' is sometimes of mostly used to replace 'Grammar' as the previous focuses on sentence meaning and parts of the sentence as a preparation for the communication while the latter does not concern with meaning at all. In other words, grammar is external to meaning (Ricoeur, 1974). As language is a means of communication and meaning (Semantics) is one of the aspects of language, Structure is a more appropriate term to use.

LLSs are proved as one of the factors behind the success in learning a language. Shmaish (2002) shows that more proficient students use strategies more frequently than the less proficient ones. Though there is no investigation on the relationship of LLSs and grammar proficiency yet, it can be assumed that LLSs may affect the learners' performance in each language skill. Extensive investigation has shown the importance of LLSs in making language learning more efficient and in effective

producing a positive effect on learners' language use (Wenden and Rubin, 1987; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1996, Cohen, 1990). The most general findings among the investigations of LLSs was the use of appropriate LLSs leads to improved proficiency or overall achievement or in specific skill areas (Wenden and Rubin, 1987; Chamot and Kupper, 1989; Oxford and Crookall, 1989; Cohen, 1990; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1993; Oxford, Park-Oh, Ito, and Sumrall, 1993). These studies also supported the notion that the use of appropriate learning strategies enables students to take responsibilities for their own learning by enhancing learner autonomy, independence, and self-direction.

Thus, this study was conducted to help the English learners in Indonesia to identify their learning strategies and to show teachers as well as lecturers of a second or a foreign language that it is important to identify and comprehend how the strategies of their students are applied in varied language activities so that they can play an active and supportive roles, which can enhance the duties of language teachers or lecturers. Furthermore, it is also necessary to ask the students systematically to describe in details how they proceed in performing their learning strategies. This is suggested by O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner, Kupper and Russo (1985: 557) saying that the learning strategies of good language learners, once identified and successfully taught to less competent learners, could have considerable potential for enhancing the development of second or foreign language skills.

The matters mentioned earlier and others need to be taken into account by the Indonesian teachers (and/or lecturers) because their students need to keep on learning foreign languages, even when they are no longer in a formal classroom setting. Both

students and teachers are well aware of the importance of studying English for gaining admission of future job vacancies as English has become one of the inclusive requirements. It can be clearly seen in job vacancy advertisements that one of the requirements to be fulfilled is proficiency in spoken and written English besides the computer literacy. And it is known for sure that apart from other factors, the reality which is faced by some if not most learners is the poor mastery of English. On the teachers' part, if they include by stressing learning strategies as part of their instruction, they can play an active role in helping their students to become successful learners of the target language. Thus, research on the LLSs of the Indonesian students should not only sensitize the students and teachers to the use of these strategies but also encourage them to develop their own profiles of the learning strategies at work in their classrooms.

### **1.2 Problems of the Study**

With reference to the background of the study, there are two questions to be posed in this research, namely;

1. What Language Learning Strategies are the most frequently used?
2. Is there any significant difference between Language Learning Strategies used by the high and the low scoring students in grammar proficiency?

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to answer the questions as stated in the research problems. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate the strategies used by the students and to focus on the differences between Language Learning Strategies used by high and low scoring students due to grammar proficiency.

### 1.4 Scope of the Study

This study is focused on the third year students of the Faculty of English Literature, Islamic University of North Sumatera with regard to the Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) use under the categories proposed by Oxford (1990). The LLSs are divided into two main classes, namely direct and indirect strategies which are further subdivided into 6 groups which include Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Affective and Social. This study will investigate which strategies among the six are most frequently used by students in class, especially in studying grammar.

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

In general, a study on LLSs is always very exciting and interesting to be conducted. The findings of this study are expected to be useful in terms of helping the students in realizing the needs of understanding their own learning strategies in general and to choose appropriate strategies in particular, which are suitable for them. The information and knowledge of the various LLSs will certainly provide a better insight and understanding in dealing with others and oneself in terms of trying to find

the best strategies to discover the best outcomes of the teaching and learning processes.

This study is hoped to be useful as a valuable input for teachers as well as lecturers in understanding the different LLSs used by their students. In addition, it may also provide a finding leading to further in-depth studies, which attempt to analyze the correlation between the language learning and other aspects of the learning itself.

