CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Foreign language aptitude has become subject of interest to foreign language researchers in the United States since the 1920s, with the main purpose to predict one's success in language learning, or prognostication. Spolsky (1995) stated that the early interest in language aptitude came from colleges and universities. However, the later development in the 1960s was mainly initiated by the government.

The early attempts to develop foreign language aptitude test took place between 1920s and 1930s when experts in language created prognosis tests. Among the earliest tests written was one by Stoddard and Vander Beke (1925), which included English grammar and Esperanto words. In 1928, Luria and Orleans developed *Luria-Orleans modern language prognosis test* that included vocabulary exercises and grammar translations in Spanish and French. After that, a team at George Washington University (Hunt et al., 1929) developed a *Language aptitude test* that involved learning elements of an artificial language. Symonds (1930a, b), who developed a *Foreign language prognosis test*, suggested that "three types of aptitude were important: (1) ability in the students' native language, (2) general intelligence, and (3) quick-learning tests in the new language" (as cited in Sparks and Ganschow, 2001). His test was important for predicting performance in French high school classes.

Nevertheless, Kaulfers (1939), a foreign-language education researcher, showed pessimistic view toward those tests. In his opinion, "…it is inconceivable that any one test, however comprehensive, could predict achievement in a field in which such a variety of methods, materials, and objectives abounds." (as cited in Spolsky, 1995). He wrote reviews on ***Luria-Orleans modern language prognosis test*** and Symonds' ***Foreign language prognosis test.*** He stated that the former was not applicable for current situation, for it seemed to predict achievement using the traditional grammar-translation method, which was popular ten years ago. He also claimed that the test had low validity and only gave little advantage for the purpose of prognostication. The latter, meanwhile, was said to be no more than general intelligence test, was short of any validity data, and gave low correlation to support prediction of achievement in language learning. Moreover, it was too difficult for eighth graders.

During World War II, admission to intensive language training courses in the military was based primarily on previous education. As language training increased in the military, the U.S. Army funded a research of foreign language aptitude led by psychologists Dorcus et al. (1950-1953) at UCLA. The group developed a paper and pencil test measuring ten "major aptitude skills" for six different languages, which include Russian, Hungarian, Serbo-Croatian, Arabic, Japanese and Mandarin Chinese. However, the results of the project were disappointing because of "…their lack of understanding of language and their unwillingness to start from the current state of knowledge in the field of language learning" (Spolsky, 1995).

In the 1960s, John Carroll carried out studies on foreign language aptitude funded by Carnegie Foundation and conducted at the Laboratory for Research in Instruction, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University. He wanted to find an accurate measurement for prognostication purpose. His reason was simply to help the U.S. government on costly budget they had spent for language learning purpose, since he saw failures in the training programs as well as in the screening test available. There were two propositions that became his premise: (1) talent to learn to speak a foreign language is a specialized talent or group of talents, which is separated of intelligence; and, (2) strong foreign language aptitude is rare in the general population. Thus, we must be selective in choosing people that will join expensive intensive program (1962). He reviewed the previous predictive tests written in 1920s and 1930s and noted that the tests had generally been limited to pencil-and-paper testing of English language ability or work-sampling of short lessons in cognitive, intellectual aspects of formal language learning. These tests, in general, correlated quite highly with intelligence tests, and were good predictors of learning to read and translate, but were irrelevant to learning to speak a language in an intensive program.

Meanwhile, the tests written by Dorcus et al. (1953), in his viewpoint, failed to spot the significant abilities in language learning. For example, its subtest, memory for digits, lacked relevance to language learning. On the contrary, they did not have memory for sound, which is important to predict success in language learning.

Carroll started with an initial battery that contained 20 separate tests, each intended to check each aspect of verbal ability proposed by French (1951): verbal knowledge, word fluency, fluency of expression, associative memory and naming. He also included phonetic discrimination task that was developed by Stanley Sapon. He tried three kinds of work-sample tests in order to find the most basic abilities in language learning, the discrete primary skills. However, he failed to achieve his goal. He thus changed his purpose to find the smallest trial learning situation that would predict performance in a full course. The new test was given try-out in some different situations with quite satisfactory result.

Together with Stanley Sapon, he developed the commercial form of prognosis test, and it was published by the Psychological Corporation under the name *Modern Language Aptitude Test* (*MLAT*) in 1959. The main purpose of the test was to be used in intensive courses of university level or for adults. It measures foreign language aptitude using a simulated format (i.e., an artificial foreign language) and English grammar. Through factor-analytic study, he found four major components in language aptitude: (a) phonemic coding ability, the ability to code foreign sounds in a way that they can be remembered later; (b) grammatical sensitivity, the ability to recognize the grammatical functions of words in sentences; (c) inductive language learning ability, the ability to infer linguistic forms, rules, and patterns from new linguistic content; and (d) rote learning ability, the ability to form and remember associations between stimuli (Carroll, 1962, 1981, 1985). These language skills form the basis for the test.

In 1962, Carroll wrote an article reviewing his major study in language aptitude. He realized that aptitude only is not enough to predict one's chance of success in foreign language learning. He said such test was '... oversimplified, if not downright wrong'. A better model would take into account other relevant factors, such as motivation and instructional variables. He proposed a model that included at least *two* instructional variables: (1) adequacy of presentation, and (2) the time allowed for learning; and *three* individual variables: (a) verbal intelligence, (b) aptitude: amount of time needed to learn, and (c) motivation: the amount of time the learner would apply himself to the task.

Soon after that, Paul Pimsleur and his associates developed other measurement of foreign language aptitude, the *Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery* (*PLAB*) in 1966. The PLAB was the result of 8 years of interest in language aptitude. In 1958, they initiated a review of the literature on factors related to success in foreign language study. The finding was published in 1962 under the title "Student Factors in Foreign Language Learning (Pimsleur, Mosberg & Morrison). According to the literature review, seven factors were considered as the most relevant to a student's success in foreign language learning: (a) intelligence, (b) verbal ability, (c) pitch discrimination, (d) order of language study and bilingualism, (e) study habits, (f) motivation and attitudes, and (g) personality factors. Of these, verbal intelligence and motivation were clearly identified as factors contributing to success in foreign language learning. The conclusion became the basis in structuring PLAB.

Pimsleur agreed with Carroll's idea about individual variables in his review article (1962), which is: verbal intelligence. However, his concept of motivation was different with Carroll's. What Carroll meant by motivation was the amount of time the learner would apply himself to the task; but Pimsleur assumed that motivation was a genuine interest of the foreign language learners in learning a modern foreign language. Moreover, he added auditory ability as a part of aptitude for learning a modern foreign language. Therefore, his aptitude measurement defined three factors: (1) verbal intelligence, (2) motivation, and (3) auditory ability. The term 'verbal intelligence' came from a mixed concept between 'verbal ability' and 'intelligence'. It means the knowledge of words and the ability to reason analytically in using verbal materials. 'Motivation', as it has been explained before, relates to interest in learning a modern foreign language; while 'auditory ability' has the same concept with 'pitch discrimination'. Having a good ability to discriminate pitch is very significant in order to learn a foreign language well.

Other foreign language aptitude tests that came subsequently include the *Army Language Aptitude Battery* (ALAT) that was developed by Horne in 1971. The purpose of the test was to predict learner's success, particularly in learning to speak and read Western Indo-European languages. In 1975, Green developed *The York Language Aptitude Test*. It tested the ability of learners to use analogy to produce forms in an unknown language (Swedish). Soon after that, Petersen and Al-Haik created the *Defence Language Aptitude Battery* (*DLAB*) in 1976. It was used to select individuals from all the armed services to study at the Defense

Language Institute (DLI) in Monterey, California. It tested learners' ability to learn an artificial language through auditory and visual materials and was particularly designed for learners at the higher end of the ability range. In 1990, Parry and Child created *VORD*, a test of an artificial language. It was based on a grammatical system similar to that of Turkish. The name *VORD* means 'word' in that language. Finally, Grigorenko, Sternberg, and Ehrman developed CANAL – F (Cognitive Ability for Novelty in Acquisition of Language – Foreign) test in 2000. This test used Ursulu language and consisted of nine sections. The test was based on a simulation in which the test-takers were expected to learn elements of a new artificial language (Spolsky, 1995).

All aptitude tests mentioned earlier were intended for native speakers of English. Nevertheless, the main instrument of this study was Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB). It was chosen because of its content that incorporates other aspect besides aptitude. Though the test-takers were not native speakers of English, they were graduate students of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Therefore, their competence in English was considered qualified to do the test. Their aptitude scores would be correlated with their achievement scores in foreign language learning. In this case, Advanced English scores would be regarded as their achievement scores. It was hoped to see the positive correlation of aptitude-achievement scores, since aptitude was meant to be prognosis test.

The researcher was personally interested in this topic, because aptitude has the main characteristic as a prediction tool. It can be used to help maximizing the chances of successful language learning for students. Moreover, it is also useful to

identify strength and weaknesses of each student, and give advice in further for teachers or counselors to make decision about their students' language training program. In addition, it is still an uncommon thesis topic in Indonesia, and it is interesting, as well as challenging, to have a deeper understanding of it.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

This research tried to find answers to these research questions:

1. What was the language aptitude score of MPBI students?

2. Was there any correlation between students' aptitude and achievement scores?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study wanted to find out the language aptitude of MPBI Students, particularly students of batch 12 and 13. It also tried to find the correlation between students' aptitude and achievement scores. Advanced English scores were regarded as their achievement scores.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Carroll (1981) mentioned that "the predictive validity coefficients for foreign language aptitude batteries in representative samples are typically in the range .4 to .6 against suitable criterion measures of success in foreign language attainment, such as final course grades, objective foreign language attainment tests, or instructors' estimates of language learning ability… It can be said, in fact,

that foreign language success is more easily and better predicted, on the basis of aptitude test scores, than most other types of achievement" (p. 96).

Furthermore, "the predictive validity of the PLAB is demonstrated through correlations with final grades and correlations with end of course achievement tests. Correlations with final grades comprising 500 students range from .44 to .79…" (Stansfield, 1988, p. 443).

In addition, Curtin, Avner, and Smith (1983) administered the PLAB to 311 first-year students and 252 advanced (typically fourth-year) students of French, German, Russian, and Latin. They found a correlation with final grade of only .34 for the first-year group and .23 for the advanced group.

Finally, Reves (1983) demonstrated that aptitude functions as an effective predictor in second (acquisition-rich, with exposure to naturalistic language use) as well as foreign (acquisition-poor, with exposure only or mainly to classroom language) contexts. Reves administered aptitude tests to a group of Arabic LI learners of Hebrew (SL context) and English (FL context). The aptitude tests generated the best prediction of language learning success in *both* contexts, and there was little difference in levels of prediction for each of the languages.

1.5 Hypothesis

There was a strong correlation between foreign language aptitude and achievement scores.

1.6 Delimitation and Limitation

The researcher would limit herself to finding out the correlation of aptitude and achievement scores of MPBI students. Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB) was used as the main instrument for getting the aptitude scores, while Advanced English scores were regarded as the achievement scores. Other factor such as length of study, or final GPA would not be taken into account.

1.7 Significance of the Study

In practical field, aptitude test is suitable for educational institutions, particularly institutions which offer language training program. The test could be used in the entrance test to select right candidates to join the program. Moreover, it also functions as a diagnosis tool in which teachers or counselors would get to know about the students' strengths and weaknesses and offer enrichment or remedial help when needed. In government language training program, it would be beneficial to screen people with aptitude test in order to make sure that the money spent for the program is used effectively and efficiently.

In theoretical field, this study would enrich literature on foreign language learning, particularly one which is written by Indonesian. Scholars would understand the correlation between aptitude and achievement in foreign language learning. This research could serve as a basis for further study as well. In the future, it will be very useful to develop the Indonesian version of aptitude measurement.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

1. Foreign Language Aptitude

   Foreign language aptitude is an empirically developed, operational construct which predicts the extent and rate of classroom language learning by an individual relative to other individuals (Carroll and Sapon, 1959; Carroll, 1973, 1981).

2. Achievement in foreign language learning

   Achievement in foreign language learning is the notion that the individual can have acquired certain specified capabilities of actual performance, these capabilities being the outcomes of the learning task or program for which the individual's aptitude may have been assessed (Carroll, 1981).

3. Advanced English

   Advanced English is a subject that teaches formal English lexicon. It is taught at the first semester of MPBI program.

4. Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery

   Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery is an aptitude test measurement developed by Pimsleur, Stansfield, and Reed to test students in grade 7-12. It was published in 1966 and intended for native speakers of English. It emphasizes three aspects: (1) verbal intelligence, the knowledge of words and the ability to reason analytically in using verbal materials; (2) motivation in learning a modern foreign language; and (3) auditory ability, the ability to receive and process information through the ear.

5. MPBI Students

   MPBI students are students who pursue their master degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

1.9 The Organization of the Thesis

There are five chapters in this thesis. Chapter one begins with the background of the study, statement of the problems, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, hypothesis, delimitation and limitation, significance of the study, and definition of key terms. Chapter two is the review of related literature. Chapter three is the research methodology. Here, the researcher explained the research design, population and sample, instruments used, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter four consists of findings and discussion. Finally, chapter five is conclusion and suggestion.