

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the study

Almost everybody knows that English nowadays plays an important role as a medium of international communication throughout the world. It even has become a selection criterion for higher studies and job vacancies. To this point Brumfit (1982:1) claims that “English is an international language that is the most widespread medium of international communication both because of the number and geographical spread of its speaker, and because the large number of non-native speakers who use it for part at least of their international contact.” Here, in Indonesia English even has become a compulsory subject for all schools. According to curriculum 1997 (*Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan R.I.*, 1997), English is officially taught to the students starting from elementary schools up to universities. In elementary schools, English is officially taught starting from the fourth grade. But, in reality, many schools start teaching English to the first grade students. There are also some of the kindergartens have started teaching English to their students. It can be predicted that sooner or later English will be the most important foreign language that is needed in Indonesia besides of the Mandarin language.

Considering the importance of English, several universities in Surabaya and elsewhere in Indonesia offer English as a curricular subject to their students for at least one semester, and some even offer it as an English Education Department or Study Program. As a curricular subject, English is taught generally to all of the students eventhough they are taking a non English Medium Study Program. In an English Education Study Program henceforth (EESP), English is taught as a major to the students.

One of the universities in Surabaya that has English both as a study program and as a class subject is Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, henceforth (WMSCU) which started the English Education Study Program of the Teachers Training and Education Faculty on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1962 (FKIP Unika Widya Mandala 2005; 77). It is expected that all English Department graduates will become qualified English teachers. In order to reach the goal, the English Department students should have a good mastery of all English language components, namely vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation; and also all English language skills, namely listening, speaking, writing, and reading.

Allen (1980:4) states that listening is one of the four language skills that play an important role in communication. Allen's idea is also supported by Nicholas (1988; 19), who states that listening is a phase of personal communication that gets close to the core of a human being to seek a basis for understanding. What Nicholas means here is that every human being needs to listen first in order to understand what is being addressed to him or her. People would not be able to produce any responses to what the speaker says if they do not understand the meaning of the message. Underwood (1989:1) also points out that to listen successfully to spoken language, we need to be able to work out what the speakers mean when they use particular words in particular ways on particular occasions and not simply to understand the words themselves.

Due to the importance of listening, the English Department of WMSCU includes Listening as a subject in its curriculum. This subject has six (6) credit hours and is given in two (2) semesters: Listening 1 and 2. It is expected that the English Department students will be good at listening with comprehension after taking the listening class in two (2) semesters. So far, no one at the English Department has ever studied and written

a thesis about the students' listening comprehension ability yet. The theses that are found in the Widya Mandala Catholic University's library only talk about the difficulties in comprehending listening. Consequently, no one really knows to what extent the students are able to comprehend English oral texts or what their strengths and weaknesses in comprehending English oral texts are. The English Department only knows the students' listening comprehension ability from the transcript of the students' score (KHS) and so do the students. It seems that the English Department assumes that the students who get A or B are considered to be good at listening. The others who get C are considered to be sufficient in listening. Then, those who get D and E are considered failures in listening comprehension.

Experience, however, tells the writer that there is no guarantee for the students of the English Department of WMSCU who have passed listening 1 and 2 with good scores will also get the same scores when they take an International English Proficiency Tests like IELTS and TOEFL Test. Since 2001 all of the new and old students of the English Department of WMSCU have to take an English Proficiency Test, in our case TOEFL Test, which is intended to inform the department about the level of the English mastery of each student. From the result of the test, the EESP of WMSCU will be able to help the students improve their levels of English mastery. Therefore, from the English Proficiency Test which was held by the EESP of WMSCU on Saturday, 12 August 2006, it is found that the students' total score of the listening section is lower than that of the reading section, but it is higher than their score in the grammar section (see Appendix II A). Then, the writer observed the problems that caused the students to score lower in the listening section by asking some questions informally about the materials or the skills of

listening taught in the classroom to the Academic Year of 2005 students and also to the listening teachers.

From her informal interview either with the lectures' talks and the students' talks, the writer concludes that the reason why the students' score lower in the listening section is that from the two skills of listening, macro and micro skills taught to the students in the classroom, the students learn more about the macro skills like finding out the main ideas, supporting details, or answering other comprehension questions rather than the micro skills that deals with the sounds and special English expressions. It is proved that many students have some difficulties in understanding the English oral texts because they do not understand the special expression that is uttered by the speaker. So many of them answer the questions wrongly or they do not answer it. Brown (2004; 121) states "In understanding a conversation, we have to begin from the specific parts to general parts. If we only focus on the macro skills, it means we only teach the students the general parts of a conversation." Here, the writer agrees that if the hearers do not understand what the speaker says or only get the topic of what they say, it is still hard for them to give an appropriate response.

That is why the writer tries to find out whether the skills of listening that are taught in the classroom by the listening lectures now are enough to make the students comprehend listening or needed to be improved by adding some others skill that the students really need to comprehend listening by analyzing the students' strengths and weaknesses in the listening. In doing this research, the writer used the English Proficiency Test as the measurement. In collecting the data, the writer took the students' answer sheets of the English Proficiency Test held by the English Department on Saturday, 12

August 2006. The writer believes that the English Proficiency Test is appropriate enough to find out the data and evaluate the English Proficiency of students whose native language is not English. It is expected that the result of this study might be useful as an input to improve the process of teaching – learning in listening classes.

## **1.2. Statements of the problems**

In line with the background of the study, the major problem of the research problem can be formulated as follow:

“To what extent are the English Department students of Widya Mandala Catholic University (WMCU) able to comprehend the English oral texts?”

Besides as stated in Chapter II, there are 8 listening sub-skills, macro and micro skills that the writer used as her parameters. Those skills are spelled out into the following minor problems:

*Dealing with Micro skills:*

1.2.1. To what extent are the students able to restate of the topic of a short conversation?

1.2.2. To what extent are the students able to find the correct response to a negative statement?

1.2.3. To what extent are the students able to understand who or what is doing the action in a passive sentence?

*Dealing with Macro skills:*

1.2.4. To what extent are the students able to find the expressions of suggestion?

1.2.5. To what extent are the students able to determine who the speaker is, where the dialogue takes place and when something happened?

1.2.6. To what extent are the students able to find the expressions of agreement?

1.2.7. To what extent are the students able to find the topic or the main idea of a longer conversation?

1.2.8. To what extent are the students able to find details based on the order of the conversation?

### **1.3. Objectives of the study**

In accordance with the problem statements listed above, the major objective of the study under report is that the students are able to describe the extent to which the students under study are able to comprehend English oral texts of answering the questions in the Listening section of English Proficiency Test.

In line with the major objective, the minor objectives of the study under report are formulated as follow:

1.3.1. To describe the extent to which the students under study are able to restate of the topic of a short conversation.

1.3.2. To describe the extent to which the students under study are able to find the correct response to a negative statement.

1.3.3. To describe the extent to which the students under study are able to find the expressions of suggestion.

1.3.4. To describe the extent to which the students under study are able to understand who or what is doing the action in a passive sentence.

1.3.5. To describe the extent to which the students under study are able to determine who the speaker is, where the dialogue takes place and when something happens.

1.3.6. To describe the extent to which the students under study are able to find the expressions of agreement.

1.3.7. To describe the extent to which the students under study are able to find the topic or the main idea of a longer conversation.

1.3.8. To describe the extent to which the students under study are able to find details based on the order of the conversation.

#### **1.4. Significance of the study**

The findings of this study are expected to find out the students' strengths and weaknesses in comprehending certain skills of listening. It is expected that the result of the study might be useful for reflective tools for the listening lectures of the English Department of WMSCU in order to improve the process of teaching and learning in listening classes. This study also expects the listening lectures pay more attention to the listening skills that the students are really needed to comprehend English oral texts.

#### **1.5. Scope and Limitation**

Being aware of the limited time and the broadness of the topic, the writer decided to limit the scope of this study in terms of the students as the subject of the study and the problem of the study. The subjects of this study are the Academic Year 2005 students of the English Department of WMSCU who passed Listening 1 and Listening 2 subjects. Then, the writer also limits her problem of the study on the students' listening comprehension ability. Besides, this study is using an English Proficiency Test as a tool to measure the students' listening ability.

At first, the writer wants to administer a TOEFL Test from *Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test "The Paper Test"* to the students because the writer thought that the sub-skills of listening in each problem item stated in the book are appropriate enough with the skills that are taught to the students in the two listening courses. However, considering with number of the students who are going to do the test which is held by the writer, the writer decides to cooperate with the English Department of WMSCU by using the students' results of the previous English Proficiency Test held by the English Department of WMSCU t on Saturday, 12 August 2006.

Since the writer is using the students' answer sheets of the English Proficiency Test held by the English Department of WMSCU on Saturday, 12 August 2006., the writer has to make the transcript of the conversation in the test by her because none of the lectures in the English Department of WMSCU know from what reference books are taken for the test.

### **1.6. Assumptions**

In this study, the writer used an English Proficiency Test as a tool to measure the students' listening ability. The writer assumes that the English Proficiency Test is a standardized test that specifies a set of competencies (standard) for a given domain and through a process of construct validation they program a set of tasks that have been designed to measure the English Proficiency of people whose native language is not English. One of the English Proficiency tests that the writer used is TOEFL test. The writer uses TOEFL Test since this test is a standard test and it gives valid and reliable data.

## **1.7. The Definition of the Key Terms**

Before the writer comes to the next chapter, it is important for the writer to define the key terms used in this study to avoid misunderstanding. The key terms defined are as follows:

- a. Listening Ability: the capability of getting the meaning from something we hear (Rost, 2002; 2).
- b. Listening Comprehension: the sense of understanding what the language used refers to in one's experience or in the outside world. (Rost, 2002:59).
- c. English Proficiency Test is a test to evaluate the English Proficiency of people whose native language is not English (Brown,2004:44).
- d. Micro skills: skills that are focusing on the smaller bits and chunks of language and led on the listeners to understand a communication uttered in high speed from the language used (Richards (1983) quoted by Brown, 2004:121).
- e. Macro skills: skills that are focusing on the larger elements and led on the listeners in constructing meaning based on their prior knowledge. (Richards (1983) quoted by Brown, 2004:121).

## **1.8 Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter one is the study in terms of its background of the study, statements of the problem, objectives, significance, scope and limitation of the study, definition of key terms, and the organization of the thesis. Chapter two reviews the existing literature which is relevant to the study under report. Chapter three deals with the study's nature, subjects, instruments, data of the study, procedure of

data collection, and procedure of data analysis. Chapter four presents the findings and the discussion of the findings. Finally, chapter five closes the study under report by summarizing the whole thesis and providing suggestions for further research.