CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides background of the study, research questions, aims of the study, limitation of the study, significance of the study, clarification of terms, and paper organization.

1.1 Background of the Study

Language, especially English, is commonly divided into four skills, which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Cameron, 2001). In school context, the latter one is believed as an important part of the curriculum. The importance of writing exists from the earliest to the highest grade. The consequence of this situation is, most children in the countries that have a formal education system will learn to write in school setting (Weigle, 2002). It implies that their ability in writing contributes to their academic success.

There is one thing to consider about learning writing, as Weigle (2002) states in her book that when someone does not have any knowledge about vocabulary and grammar of a second language, then it is quite impossible for that person to write something in the second language. Based on her statement, writing is highly valued in academic setting. Moreover, educational research has suggested that language accuracy has place in written language which makes language in written form is more highly valued than in spoken form.

Grabowski in 1996 (as cited in Weigle, 2002) gives a statement that writing has "a more standardized system which must be acquired through special instruction" (p. 4). The standardized system can be considered as language conventions such as voice, tone, style, accuracy, and mechanics (Weigle, 2002). The presence of this standardized system in writing "allows for a higher degree of sanctions when people deviate from that standard" (Grabowski, 1996, as cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 4). Therefore, it is clear that learners need to comprehend the language conventions especially grammatical accuracy and use them appropriately in their writing tasks.

The sanction that has been mentioned by Grabowski above can be realized in Noguchi's statement (as cited in McAlexander, 2000), in which grammatical errors are perceived improper in professional settings. Craig strengthens this idea through survey of the workplace in 2001 (as cited in Davis & Mahoney, 2005) which shows that 98% of all respondents agreed that correct spelling, grammar, and mechanics were considered important in their writing on the job. From the notions above, it can be concluded that there is a responsibility for teachers to help learners to improve their grammatical accuracy in writing. Because, Bizzell in 2000 (as cited in Davis & Mahoney, 2005) mentions that "correctness is a perennial issue in basic writing instruction" (p. 4), in which grammatical errors may continue to happen in learners' writing in the future if it is not fixed as soon as possible.

Grammatical accuracy also contributes in achieving the goal of communication. Grammatical accuracy, as suggested by Larsen-Freeman in 2003 and Lush in 2002 (as cited in Puengpipattrakul, 2009), is important in writing since it ensures the intended meaning of the writers and prevents misunderstanding in communication. Further, grammatical accuracy is considered to be able to create an effective writing (Balaghizadeh & Gordani, 2012). Therefore, comprehending grammatical accuracy does not simply aim to avoid the difficult situation in academic and professional context, but it also has more practical meanings.

There is a contrast between the statements that have been mentioned earlier and a notion from Hillocks (as cited in McAlexander, 2000). Educational research in 1970s, 80s, and 90s suggest that grammar instruction gave small effect on writing, while content and organization were favoured as major elements in writing. Nevertheless, Balaghizadeh and Gordani (2012) assert that grammatical accuracy is an important aspect in composing a good piece of writing. The consequence of implementing accurate grammar in writing is, learners have opportunity in advancing their level of English.

Regarding to the importance of grammatical accuracy in writing as has been mentioned above, in fact there are some cases in which students still cannot

apply the correct grammar in their writing tasks. According to Puengpipattrakul (2009), the first-year university Thai undergraduates did not possess sufficient ability in employing appropriate grammar in their English writing. Although the learners had already studied English tenses since primary school, they still found difficulty in verb tense accuracy.

The similar situation were faced by the eight grade students in Bandung. The English teacher and the result of the students' try-out tests state that the students were actually able to write descriptive texts, because they had already learnt descriptive text in the previous grade. In their writing, most of them had clear idea and sufficient knowledge of descriptive text. However, the problem was they could not apply the correct grammar in their writing tasks. Although several times the English teacher had explained the grammar aspects that were usually misused by the students, but they still found some difficulties, for example in deciding whether they had to use subject pronouns *he* and *she*, object pronouns *him* or *her*, or possessive adjectives *his* or *her*. Deesri (as cited in Yolageldili & Arikan, 2011) report that the students feel uncomfortable and stressful in the classroom because they have to master unfamiliar and unknown grammatical structures. On the other hand, students' failure in applying correct grammar in writing may be caused by boring explanation, as suggested by Tuan and Doan (2010). The combinaton of uncomfortable atmosphere, stressful situation, and tedious grammar explanation appeared as an issue in this eight graders' class. The conclusion is, there is a need to teach grammar in more engaging way for learners. Games can be used as an alternative teaching technique that can sustain the students' interest in learning language, especially grammar (Tuan & Doan, 2010).

Games are fun activities with a goal that has to be achieved by employing some rules (Hadfield, 1990, as cited in Tuan & Doan, 2010). The word 'fun' causes games, in some cases, are usually done in classes as time fillers. However, Klippel (as cited in Dalton, 2005) proposes that games should not be perceived as marginal and filler activities, but games should have a better place in language teaching program, because actually games have potential strengths and beneficial pedagogical values.

Rinvolucri (as cited in Yorikan & Alegeldili, 2011) suggests that games can be used in any stages when presenting grammar in class. First, games can be used before presenting the grammar which aim to investigate students' prior knowledge about the grammar. Second, games also can be employed after the grammar has been explained, in order to check students' comprehension about the grammar. Third, games can be utilized as a revision of a grammar area.

This study favours the second and third function of games in which learners are allowed to have exercises of grammar aspects that they have already learnt and also to review them, because Yolageldili and Arikan (2011) add that "games provide learners with an opportunity to drill and practice grammatical rules and forms by presenting them in a communicative way" (p. 223). In a same vein, Ara (2009) states that repetition can be found in games, therefore by using games students can accustom themselves to use language. Although repetition in some cases is potential to create an activity becomes tedious, but in games this condition can be reduced. Hadfield (as cited in Tuan & Doan, 2010) supports that "games can be used . . . as a memory aid and repetition drill" (p. 67). Thus, by using games, it is hoped that the eight grade students can accustom and familiarize themselves with grammar. The expected result is, they can increase their grammatical accuracy in writing.

Therefore, by considering the advantages that games provide for language learning, games should not be underestimated. It would be better if games are not treated as fun tools that are designed for time-fillers in the end of the term only, but they can be perceived as an integral part of language teaching syllabus (Deesri, 2002, as cited in Yolageldili & Arikan, 2011 and Gaudart, 1999, as cited in Yu, 2005). Games should be put in the center of a language lesson, not treated only as a warm-up activity.

There are a lot of studies that are related to grammar and games, but there is a study which inspires the researcher to conduct a study that focuses on grammatical accuracy in writing. The study entitled *The Use of Journal in Developing Grammatical Accuracy in Writing* that was conducted by Walaipun Puengpipattrakul in 2009. The study aims at investigating whether journal writing

gave improvement in grammatical accuracy of Thailand students. The result is, although students showed positive responses toward the use of journal in improving their grammatical accuracy, but there was no significant improvement of their actual grammatical accuracy in journal. However, the use of journal increased students' awareness of grammatical accuracy, self-confidence in using grammar, and motivation in monitoring their own grammatical accuracy improvement. Therefore, instead of using journal, this research employs games as an effort to increase the students' grammatical accuracy in writing.

In this study, different games are utilized in increasing the students' grammar accuracy in various areas, because Byrne (as cited in Tuan, 2012) underlines that different games are potential in motivating students. Another reason why various games should be applied in this study is, according to Dalton (2005) "even the most fun game will become boring if overplayed" (p. 23).

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the explanation of research background above, therefore two research questions can be formulated as follows:

a. Is there any improve of the students' grammatical accuracy in writing descriptive texts after having games?

b. How is/are response(s) of the students toward the use of games to improve their grammatical accuracy in writing descriptive texts?

1.3 Aims of the Study

According to the research questions that have been proposed above, then the aims of the study are:

a. to investigate whether there is an improve of the students' grammatical accuracy in writing descriptive texts after having games

b. to investigate response(s) of the students toward the use of games to improve their grammatical accuracy in writing descriptive texts.

1.4 Limitation of the Study

The genre of text that is employed in this study is descriptive text. The eight graders in this study have already learnt descriptive text at the previous grade, therefore it is considered that they are familiar with this kind of text. This condition is beneficial for the researcher, since in this study, the main focus is to increase the students' grammatical accuracy in writing descriptive text. As an effort to achieve this aim, seven games are used in this study, namely: "Snatch Game", "Sticking Game", "Snowball Game", "Pet Bulaga Game", "Describe Me Game", "Sticky Notes Game", and "Changing Sentences Game".

1.5 Significance of the Study

There is an expectation that this study will give contributions in some aspects. Theoretically, it is expected that this study will give new theories about games as a language teaching technique in improving learners' grammatical accuracy in writing and a new insight into fun, lively, and stress-free learning environment. Practically, this study is expected to give an innovation and solution for teachers who are interested in improving learners' grammatical accuracy in writing, especially descriptive text. It is hoped that, regarding to the result of this study, teachers can employ games to introduce or review grammar to students in more engaging, fun, and friendly manner. Moreover, it is expected that games as a teaching technique in improving learners' grammatical accuracy is not only applicable in teaching writing descriptive text, but also for other genres of text.

1.6 Clarification of Terms

In order to avoid misinterpretation, below are the clarified terms:

a. Games

Games are organized activities that usually have some features such as a certain task or objective, a set of rules, competition between players, and communication between players by using spoken or written language (Platt and Platt, & Richards, as cited in Tuan, 2012).

b. Grammatical Accuracy

Grammatical accuracy is "the ability to use the language correctly, and grammar instruction in any language teaching/learning program mainly aims at uplifting accuracy in learners for better communication" (Ahangari & Barghi, 2012, p. 6).

c. Descriptive Text

Descriptive text is a kind of text whose purpose is to give information. The social function of descriptive text is to describe a particular person, place, or thing (Gerot & Wignell, 1994).

1.7 Paper Organization

The organization of this paper is started with Chapter I, which is introduction. This chapter introduces the issue that is discussed in this paper. It consists of background of the study, research questions, aims of the study, limitation of the study, significance of the study, clarification of terms, and paper organization. Chapter II is theoretical foundation which elaborates the related theories and the previous studies that support this research. Chapter III is research methodology with the aim of achieving the research purposes which consists of research design, data collection technique, research procedure, and data analysis procedures. Chapter IV consists of findings and discussion, which reveals the findings of the research and then elaborates the findings by using the experts' theories and the previous studies in discussion part. The last one is Chapter V which is conclusion and suggestions. This part concludes the overall findings of this study and gives some suggestions in dealing with the same problem that appears in this study. Opportunity for further research is also provided.