

## **THE READABILITY OF STUDENTS' TEXTBOOK USED IN SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC COURSE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROGRAM OF UNP**

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### **Abstract**

Many students got low score in Semantic and Pragmatic course. They complained that the textbook used in the course is difficult to understand. It is possible to consider that there is a correlation between the students' bad scores and the readability of the textbook. In previous research, it was found that suitable level of readability and reading skills are important consideration to reach maximum learning gain. Because of that, it becomes important to measure readability level, the factors which influencing readability level and the best way to use the textbook. This research was a descriptive quantitative research. The sample of this research was 3 pages from 3 chapters of the textbook, chapter 9, 10, and 11 chosen randomly from each chapter. The instruments were a written questionnaire, an online readability measurement website, and notes during interview. The findings show that the readability level measured by students and readability formula was difficult. The most influencing factors in determining readability level were interest and vocabulary difficulty. The best way to use the textbook was using one single textbook, editing by put some notes on the page, then presenting it in a lecture form by the lecturer.

**Key words:** Readability of Students' Textbook, Readability Factors, The Use of Textbook

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Today, authentic materials are common in EFL class. For example, in English language education program of Universitas Negeri Padang, the students use textbooks which are written by Jack C. Richard and David Bycina, Patricia K Werner, Alan Cruse, C.G Draper, James Dean Brown, Norman C. Stageberg, and Richard Velt who known as native speakers. It is assumed that using authentic materials in EFL classes help learners to be familiar in real English communication. However, Lu (2002) argued that authentic materials, such as authentic textbooks, are may be complicated for EFL learners (Lu, 2002).

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The word *authentic* refers to “the language produced by native speakers for native speakers in a particular language community” (Porter & Roberts, 1981; Little et al. 1989, as cited in Gilmore (2007: 3)). Since EFL students are given textbooks which are considered for native speakers, it is assumed that the students will find difficulties in understanding the textbooks. There might be a significant gap between native speaker students and non-native speaker students, especially in their capability in reading the textbook. Students who live in English speaking country get the vocabulary and language system, or grammar, in their daily life. On the other hand, students in non-English speaking country which considers English as foreign language as in Indonesia, students meet English just while they are in English class. Students get the vocabulary from the class only. Thus, giving the non-native speaker students textbooks that are commonly used for native speaker students can be harmful and frustrating.

Semantic and Pragmatic textbooks with title *Meaning in Language an Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics 3rd Edition* by Alan Cruse is indicated harmful and frustrating for students. Many students in English language education program said that the textbook was complicated to understand. These complain were supported by their low score for this course. Since many students, not just one or two students, got bad score for this course, it can be assumed that there is a correlation between their low score and the difficulty of the textbook.

Many scholars agree that readability is the most necessary issue in selecting appropriate textbook for a course (Ulusoy, 2006; Kasule, 2010; GEÇİT\*, 2010; Rezaee & Norouzi, 2011; Burton, 2014) to achieve benefits from the textbook. Kasule (2010: 63) found in his research that awareness of “readability issues will help educators to make effective reading instruction during the critical formative years of school”. It is because the result of estimating readability of textbooks shows the appropriate level of the textbooks to be used (Bailin & Grafstein, 2001; Compton, Appleton, & Hosp, 2004; Harrison, 1980 as cited in Begeny and Greene, 2013).

Readability means levels that describe the easiness of the text to be comprehended while reading it (Dubay, 2004). At the first time, readability has been measured by certain formulas. Nevertheless, formulas were discovered that they were not reliable and valid predictors of text difficulty (e.g. Redish & Selzer, 1985; Bruce, Rubin & Starr, 1981, as cited in Janan & Wray, 2012). Criticisms in readability formulas caused experts to find other methods or approaches to measure the readability.

Readability theory found that asking the target reader to measure readability is the accurate one. Because of that this study dealt with asking the target reader to measure the level of readability. However, as my research, there is still research in measuring which involved the reader. This research goals are to seek out the readability level of Semantic and Pragmatic textbooks titled *Meaning in Language an Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics 3rd Edition* by Alan Cruse measured by students in K-2017 of English language education program of Universitas Negeri Padang and Flesch Reading Ease Formula, seek out the what the students think about the factors which influencing readability level of the

textbook and the best way to use the textbook in order to understand the textbook easier.

Some previous studies for measuring students' textbooks readability were conducted. There was one study about textbook readability for primary school textbooks (Kaule, 2011). By using cloze procedure, it was found that the textbook level was difficult. In junior high school textbook, there were two studies from Langeborg (2010) and Suheri, Azhar, & Afrianto (2018). Both of them used both of Flesch formulas to measure readability level. Langeborg (2010) compared readability level of textbook series and resulted that each series has different levels. Suheri, Azhar, & Afrianto (2018) found that the textbook which they analyzed was in appropriate level. There were several studies for investigating senior high school students' textbook. The investigation used Flesch formulas (Rahmawati and Lestari, 2012; Kim & Ma, 2012; Ghorbanchian, Youhanaee, & Barati, 2014; Hidayat, 2016; Miftaahurrahmi, Fitrawati, and Syarif, 2017) and Raygor Readability Estimate (Nurhamsih, 2007) to measure the level of readability investigated senior high school students' textbooks. Cline (1972) investigated college students' textbooks in Colorado. He compared the 279 students' Nelson-Denny test scores and readability by Dale-Chall formulas of seventeen textbooks which were used by the students. Lu (2002) studied about the application of readability in reading materials selection and coursebook design for college English in an EFL context in China. It found that the role of readability was important in selecting materials and the task design for college English.

From the presented previous research, the readability of textbooks was measured by formulas. The Reading Ease Formula from Flesch found as the most used formula. It is proved that even though readability formulas are criticized, many researchers still use the formula. Since criticisms for readability formulas pronounced and explained in some researches (Hewitt & Homan, 2004; Kouamé, 2010; Rezaee & Norouzi, 2011; Janan & Wray, 2012; Tabatabaei & Bagheri, 2013; Janan & Wray, 2014; Bailin & Grafstein, 2016; Pishghadam & Abbasnejad, 2016), scholars started to find other approaches to measure readability level. Rush (1986) mentions another approaches to measure readability by "alternative methods". There are two methods, text-based alternative and reader/text-based alternative (Rush, 1986). On the other point, Heilman, Collins-Thompson, Callan, & Eskenazi (2007) conducted a study to improve readability measurement by combining lexical and grammatical features. The cloze procedure and Coh-Metrix are also viewed as another methods in measuring readability level (Bailin & Grafstein, 2016).

Asking the target readers to measure readability of the textbook is also viewed as the measurement of readability. Djatmika, Khrisna, & Nuraeni (2012) interviewed their participant and asked them to judge the books readability. Kouamé (2010) and Nababan, Nuraeni, & Sumardiono (2012) had already conducted a research which measured readability by asking the target reader to measure the textbook with scale. In Kouamé's (2010) research revealed that the students' participation, as the target readers, in investigating the readability can represent the accurate outcomes.

From the previous studies mentioned, there is still little research that investigating readability of students' textbooks by asking the target reader to measure the readability level. However, due to the definition, the level of readability should be accurate if the text is evaluated by the target reader to measure the level of readability (Ardi, 2015: 134). Because of that, the present study investigated the readability of students' textbooks by asking the target readers to measure readability level. In this case the students who currently used the textbooks are K-2017 class. The readability of Semantic and Pragmatic textbook with title *Meaning in Language an Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics 3rd Edition* by Alan Cruse was measured by deciding the level between 1 to 4 by indicators which proposed by Ardi (2015). The result of this readability was completed by Flesch Reading Ease Formula as the most used formula. What the students think about about factors which influencing readability level and how to use the textbook for getting the understanding the textbook easily completed this study.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research employed a descriptive research since it tried to describe educational phenomena, in this case readability level of students' textbooks, the factors which influencing readability level and the textbook use. According to McMillan (2008: 48-49), a descriptive research is a research which describes phenomenon in form of frequencies or percentages, averages, variability, graphs, and/or other visual images. This research intended to reveal the readability of the students' textbooks. Therefore, at the end of this research, the researcher presented the answer for research question "what" (the readability level of Semantic and Pragmatic textbooks entitled *Meaning in Language an Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics 3rd Edition* by Alan Cruse measured by students in K-2017 of English language education program of Universitas Negeri Padang and Flesch Reading Ease Formula, what the students think about factors which influencing readability level of the textbook, and what the students think about the way to use the textbook in order to understand the textbook easier). At the end of this research, the researcher then described the phenomena found in the research in form of frequency or numbers together with its explanation.

In this study, the population was the explanation in textbook title *Meaning in Language an Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics 3rd Edition* by Alan Cruse. There are 497 pages. There are 20 chapters. These chapters consist of several paragraphs from several subs of the subtitles. Because of that, the researcher took 15% from the total material. This is according to Tomlinson (2011) said that to analyze materials, it is useful to involve 10% to 15% from the total material. Then, the sample was taken from chapter 9, 10, and 11. This is also according to Tomlinson (2011) mentioned that the ideal chosen text to analyze textbook is around the midpoint. Due to the previous study, this study involved 3 pages of each chapter, chapter 9, 10, and 11. From each chapter, researcher chose the pages randomly.

Data in this research were the students' answer from written questionnaire and interview notes what the students think about the factors which influencing

readability level and textbook use. The students were the member of K-2017 classes in English language education program. There were four classes, K1-2017, K2-2017, K3-2017, and K4-2017. These classes were chosen because they currently learnt the semantic and pragmatic course. The total number for K-2017 students in English language education program in Universities Negeri Padang is 127 students. According to Gay and Diehl (1992), as cited in Londong (2011), the sample for descriptive research is 10 percent from total population. Also, Hendry (2010) cited from Roscoe (1975) stated that more than 30 and less than 500 samples for many research are appropriate. This study asked 39 students who are the member of K-2017 in English language education program in Universitas Negeri Padang. The researcher chose students for each class to participate in this study.

The researcher used written questionnaire in which contents paragraphs chosen randomly to be measured by the students who were chosen as the participants. The students were asked to measure the paragraphs by a scale. A scale started from 1 till 4 which had particular indicators to represent the level of the paragraph. The scale was taken and adopted from Ardi (2015: 138). Table 1 showed the detail of the scale.

Scale	Criteria	Indicators
1	Very Difficult	The paragraph is hard to understand because there are many unfamiliar words, there are difficult words to comprehend, and the sentences are unorganized.
2	Difficult	The paragraph is hard to understand because there are several unfamiliar words, there are several difficult words to comprehend, and the sentences are unorganized.
3	Easy	The paragraph is easy to understand, but there are few unfamiliar words, there are few difficult words to comprehend, or the sentences are unorganized.
4	Very Easy	The paragraph is easy to understand.

In the questionnaire, there were 3 pages which chosen randomly from chapter 9, 10, and 11. Below the chosen pages, there was a 1 to 4 scale. The participants who were involved to measure readability of the textbook were fifth semester students in Education major in English department of Universitas Negeri Padang. The participants were also asked about their thinks in interview about readability of the textbook and the most effective way to use the textbook. The interview was conducted to ask the students about the factors that influencing readability level of the textbook, or known as readability factors and to ask the students about the best method to use or present the textbook. Questions in interview were based on readability factors which proposed by Lu (2002) and the methods of textbook use by Hinchman (1992).

The first thing that the researcher did to get the data in measuring readability by target reader was creating the questionnaire. First, the researcher copied the chosen pages from the textbook. Then, the researcher put the indicator

of readability level in the questionnaire. Next, the researcher duplicated the questionnaires. After that, the researcher distributed the questionnaires to the participants. After the questionnaire ready, the researcher contacted and met the participants to ask their help. The students were collected in one class or one place. Then, The questionnaire were explained to the students. Next, the students answered the questionnaire. After that, the questionnaires were collected after the students finished.

Then, the answer from the students calculated. After that, the researcher classified the answers and chose the questionnaires which answer resulted difficult and very difficult level. The participants who answered the textbook in difficult and very difficult level were interviewed. Then, the participants were asked to discuss about what the students think about factors which influencing readability level of the textbook and the best way to use the textbook. Then, the researcher noted down all the interview process.

For measuring readability by Reading Ease Formula, researcher input the sample pages one by one to be calculated automatically by WebFX. WebFX was one of the examples of the website. WebFX can be accessed by visiting the website's address: <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/check.php>. This website was used because the result of the website was equal with the result of manual calculating. Then, another reason was this website helped researcher to avoid error from calculating syllables, words, or sentences.

After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the data. Data from students were analyzed by mean formula from Gay, Mills, & Airasian (2012). First, the data were analyzed by accounting the mean score for each page. Then, researcher calculated the score to get the mean score totalfor each pages to get the mean score readability level of the textbook. The results for the formula were analyzed with the same method with the result measured by the students.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Research Finding (tentative)

The answers from students were collected then the researcher counted the average score answers. From the students, the average scores of the textbook showed by table below:

Pages	Mean scores	Criteria
177	2,461538	Difficult
202	2,487179	Difficult
219	1,974359	Difficult
<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>2,307692</b>	<b>Difficult</b>

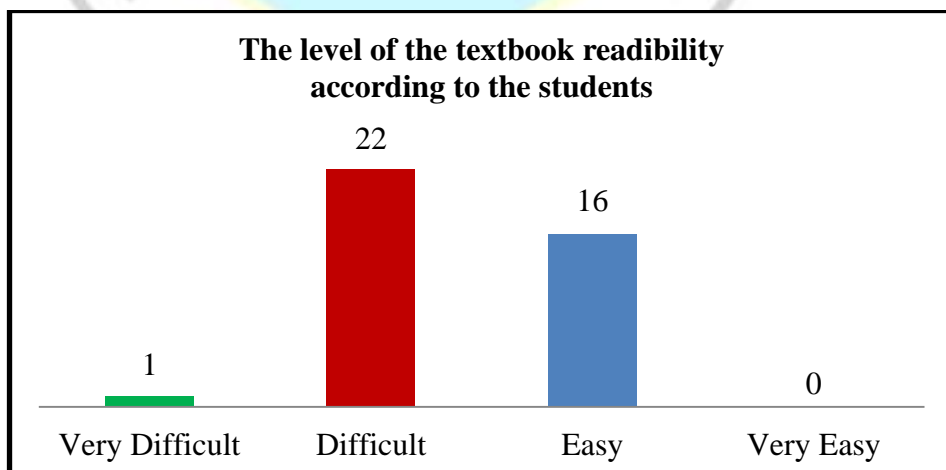
The table above shows that the readability level of the textbook with title *Meaning in Language an Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics 3rd Edition* by Alan Cruse was difficult. The readability level of each page was not different. In other word, the readability level for pages 177, pages 202 and pages 219 were difficult. It can be concluded that the students' measurement of readability level of the textbook was in difficult level.

Reading Ease Formula by Flesch also was applied in online websites to measure readability. WebFX was one of the examples of the website. The result from accounting process using this website presented in the analysis format below:

Pages/ Chapters	Average Sentence Length	Average Number of Syllables per Word	Reading Ease Score	Style Description
177/9	24.71	1.78	30.9	Difficult
202/10	12.37	1.58	60.5	Standard
219/11	25.35	1.58	47.1	Difficult
Mean Score			46.2	Difficult

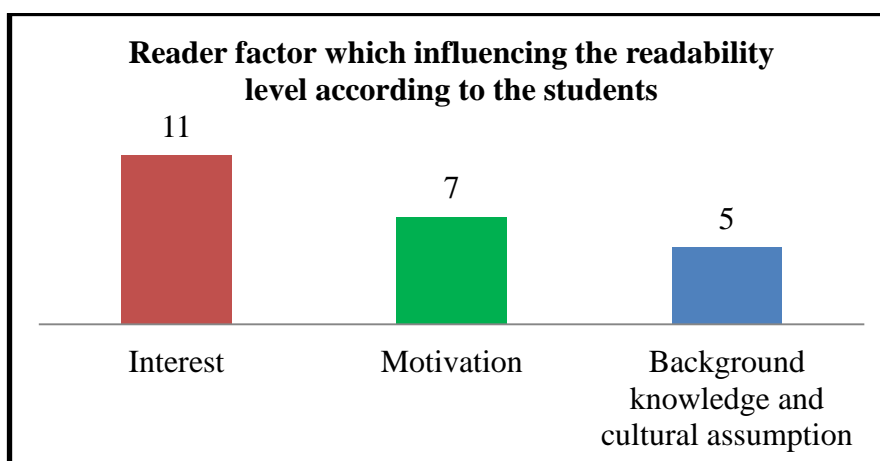
The table above shows that the readability level of the textbook was difficult. There were two texts in difficult level and one text in standard level. The texts in difficult level were texts from chapter 9 and chapter 11. The one and only one text in standard level of the textbook were the sample from chapter 10. It can be concluded that the readability level of the textbook according to Reading Ease Formula calculated from WebFX was difficult.

What the students think were collected by interviewing the students. The interview focussed on students who answered the readability of the textbook were difficult and very difficult after their answer calculated. The number of students who answered difficult and very difficult for the readability level showed in chart below.



There were 22 students answered difficult for the level of readability of the textbook. Then, there was one students answered very difficult for the readability level of the textbook. It can be concluded that there were 23 students were involved in interview. There were two goals in conducting the interview. First, the

interview was conducted to find the readability factors. There are reader factors and textbook factors. For the reader factors, there are three sub-factors. For the textbook, there are six sub-factors. Chart below showed the result factors from the readers.



The chart above reveals that interest is the most influencing factor in readability level according to the students. From interviewing the students, it was known that interest did not only related to students' feeling but also related to several things in the textbook, such as vocabulary, sentence structure, layout, and line space of the text. Then, motivation is the second factor which influencing readability level. Motivation related to the illustration in the textbook. The last factor is background knowledge and cultural assumption.

The textbook itself can influence the readability level of textbooks. There are six factors which include to this factor. Chart below shows which factor is the most influencing the readability level according to the students.

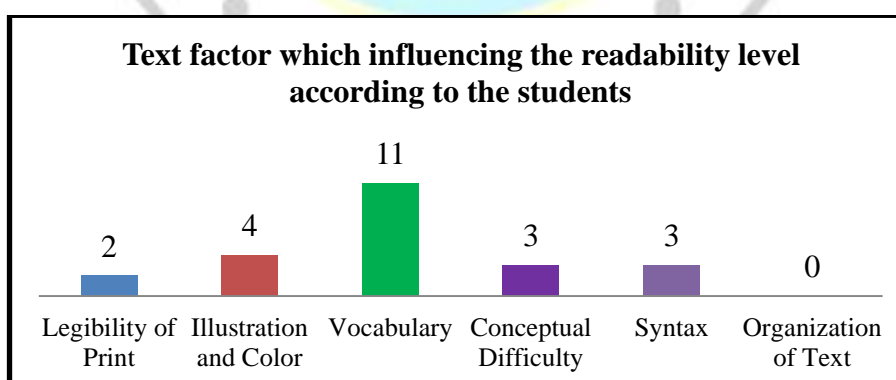
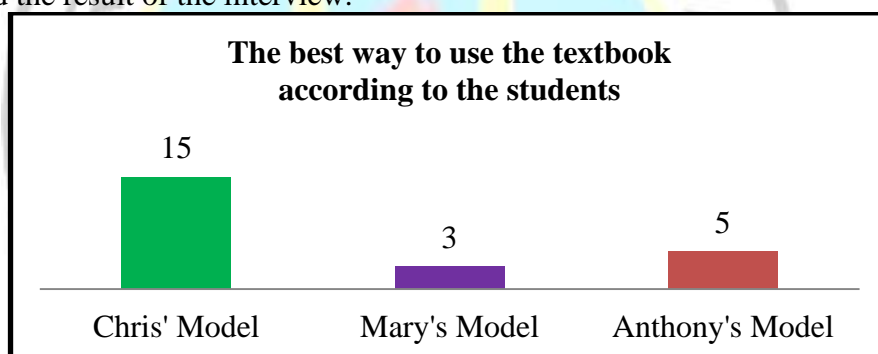


Chart 3 above shows that the most influencing factor in readability level was vocabulary. The students found many unfamiliar words in the topics. From the students' statement above, the unfamiliar word caused difficulty in understanding the topic, confusing in determining the meaning, boring and lazy while reading the topic. The students also expected that the lecturer explained the meaning of the unfamiliar words. The illustration and color factor was the second



factor. This factor could increase the students' interest and motivation to read the textbook. Conceptual difficulties and syntax were also indicated as the factor behind readability level. According to the students, the organization of text did not influence the readability level of the textbook since no one of students mentioned this factor.

Using textbook in a classroom is one thing that needs to consider in teaching learning process. However, research about how to use the textbook in classroom are still inadequate. Consequently, finding literature which related to the topic are difficult work. One research which researcher found about this topic was conducted by Hinchman (1992). From the research, three methods of using textbook in classroom were found from three model teachers. Teacher Chris uses the textbook, he decided to use one single textbook and present it in a lecture form in classroom. Teacher Mary Stevenson uses textbook in small-group discussion. She also involved supplementation of the textbook such as trade books, speakers, workbook, and other resources. Teacher Anthony Pearson asked the students to read the topic from textbook and other sources before coming to his class. Then, he conducted a whole-discussion in classroom. Twenty three students were asked to tell their thinks about the most effective way to use the textbook. Chart below showed the result of the interview.



From the chart above, it can be concluded that more than half of the students answered Chris' model as the best way to use the textbook. According to the students, Chris' model was viewed as the best way to make students understand the textbook easier. The students told that they need explanation from lecturer to understand the textbook

In conclusion, Chris' model was the best method to use textbook. This model emphasized the use of single textbook and presenting it in lecture form. Then, it was followed by Anthony's model. The method was emphasized the whole-class discussion with allowing them to find their own reading to get information before discussion. Mary's method did not find as the best method in using textbook. Only three participants who preferred to the small-group discussion or text related activities. This method also proposed the use of supplementation for the textbook.

## 2. Discussion

The result of the readability level of the textbook measured by students was difficult. This result was the same with the result from measuring the readability level by using Reading Ease Formula by Flesch. In other word,

according to the formula, the level of readability of the textbook was difficult. It means according to the Reading Ease Formula by Flesch, the textbook was appropriate for level 13th to 16th grade (college) students. In other words, the result of using Reading Ease Formula by Flesch showed that the textbook matched with the data from students who were participants in this study.

The interpretation of readability level measured by asking target reader and Flesch Reading Ease Formula is contradiction. The contradiction of the result of the study is consistent with the previous study from Cadwell (2008). The finding of Cadwell's (2008) study revealed that the target reader's opinions did not correspond to the results from Flesch formula and Gunning Fog formula. The researcher found that reading ease formula did not only matching to the reader's opinions but also to the students' reading performance.

Another possibility of the contradiction of the finding also proposed that the readability level for native speakers and non-native speakers were different. In Xia, Kochmar, & Briscoe's (2016) finding that readability formulas as text difficulty judged by native speakers, in term of comprehensibility, were in opposite direction from non-native speakers. The existing readability formulas included Reading Ease by Flesch can be seen differently by non-native speaker in English. The second language learners were difference from the first language learners in term pace of language acquisition. This finding is in line with Rottensteiner (2010). Rottensteiner (2010) found that readability formulas only noticed to linguistic difficulty and forget to consider about other criteria in the context of linguistic structures.

The finding of this research also revealed that the most influencing factor which comes from the reader is interest. This is in line with previous research from Gilliland (1968), Hetherington (1985), and Johnson (1998). Gilliland (1968) stated that the degree of interest was the most influencing factor while reading. Hetherington (1985) also stated that the first consideration from reader factor was interest. Hetherington (1985) also mentioned that interest is tied related to motivation and purpose for reading which encourage readers' to solve the linguistic difficulty of the text. This was supported by Johnson's (1998) finding who found that interest was one of the two most important factors in determining the level of readability.

The finding also showed that the most influencing readability level in the text factor was vocabulary. The finding supports previous studies from Gray & Leary (1953) in Betts (1977), Hetherington (1985), DuBay (2007), Pitler & Nenkova (2008), and Aziz, Fook, & Alsree (2010). One of the variables in the readability factor was the percentage of easy words. Betts (1977) cited in Gary & Leary found that reading difficulty was caused by the number of hard words. It means that the readability of the text is determined by the number of easy words contained in the text. As DuBay (2007) cited in Gary & Leary (1953), the finding of their research revealed the fact that material with larger number of easy words is easier to read than material with less number of easy words. Hetherington (1985) also found that most teachers and students said that vocabulary is the main factor in affecting difficulty while reading. This is supported by the finding from Pitler & Nenkova (2008). They found that vocabulary was a significant individual

factor in readability. Aziz, Fook, & Alsree(2010) also found that readability had correlation to sentence and word factors of the materials.

From three ways which Hinchman (1992) found in investigating the textbook use, the finding showed that the most effective way to use the textbook was using single textbook and presenting it in lecturer form as teacher Chris modeled. Chris taught her students by using single textbook, editing the textbook by putting some notes on the page of textbook, then presenting in lecturer format. From interview, it was also found that the students felt that using single textbook improved their confidence. They said that misunderstanding could be avoided among the students if the lecturer used only one single textbook. In other word, using more than one textbooks can exist misunderstanding and confusion while reading the textbook. Then, it found that they were not able to understand the textbook by themselves.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

The goal of this study is to describe the readability level, the factor which influencing readability level and the best way to use students' textbooks in Semantic and Pragmatic Course with title *Meaning in Language an Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics 3rd Edition* by Alan Cruse. The finding of this study was based on data which employed written questionnaire and interview research. After analyzing the data, it found the readability level, factors which influencing readability level of the textbook, and the best way to use the textbook with title *Meaning in Language an Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics 3rd Edition* by Alan Cruse.

The results contradicted. The result of the readability of the textbook measured by students means that the textbook was hard to understand because the textbook consists of several unfamiliar words, several difficult words to comprehend, and unorganized sentences. Meanwhile, the result of the readability measured by using Reading Ease Formula by Flesch referred to the estimated reading grade for the textbook was 13th to 16th grade (college). In other words, the readability level of the textbook matched with the students who participated in this study. The opposite interpretation were also found in other study about the results of readability level measurement by readability formulas and target readers' opinion and the results of readability level measurement with students' reading performances. It is also found that the difference can be caused by the different indicators between readability formulas for native speakers and non-native speakers in English.

In the readability factor, the result showed that the most influencing factor in determining the readability level of the textbook was interest and words in the text. Interest is known as the reader factor in readability level. It is important for students to have the desire to read and find enjoyment in reading. Besides, the vocabulary is known as the text factor. If the larger number of easy words are used in a textbook, the textbook will be easier to understand.

Then, another important issue that this study investigated that the best way in using the textbook. It found that the best way was using the textbook as the one and only one, editing the textbook by putting some notes onpage of the textbook,

then presenting it in a lecture format by the lecturer. This is because using the single textbook and presenting it in a lecture format by the lecturer can avoid confusion and misunderstanding among the students.

According to the findings and conclusion of the research, there are some suggestions offered to the lecturers and the next researchers. It is necessary for the lecturers to measure the readability of the textbook which will be used to read by the students. Researchers at School Renaissance Institute and Touchstone Applied Science Associates, as cited in DuBay (2007), found that “maximum learning gain requires careful matching of book readability and reading skill”. According to the discussion of the finding, it is important consideration to ask the target reader to determine readability rather than use readability formula which proposed for native speaker. The factors behind the readability level of the textbook also can give lecturers information and consideration in helping students to solve their problems in reading the textbook. This study also revealed what the students think about the best way to use the textbook.

For the next researchers, it is advisable to explore more about the readability, the factors which influencing readability level, and the textbook used in other textbooks and other courses. The next researchers can compare the readability of the textbook and the students' comprehension. Another comparison also can be conducted between the readability, the readability factors and the textbook used in one course to another course, or in one semester to another semester.

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