CHAPTER 1

RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY: WHY IS READING ALOUD OF INTEREST AND WHAT WERE THE AIMS OF THIS STUDY?

1.1 Rationale

Reading aloud, or oral reading (the two phrases seem to be used virtually synonymously), has been a widespread practice throughout history and around the world. Religious ceremonies, political presentations, public debate, the performance of poetry or other art forms, the broadcasting of information: participants in all these activities make use of reading aloud to achieve their ends. So too does education, and there can have been few classrooms through the ages in which reading aloud has not featured, whether we think of the teacher reading to the students or the students reading orally in chorus or individually. In this study we will be focussing on students' oral reading, and particularly on the use of this practice with adult and young adult learners of English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL or EFL), but viewing this initially in a broad framework.

The practice of having learners read aloud in class certainly continues today in a range of Australian educational situations: for instance, in first-language (L1) learning situations such as mainstream infants and primary classes where young students are taking their first steps in reading in English, in remedial reading groups, in adult literacy classes; and also in second-language (L2) learning environments, at both school and adult level, including those where English is the target language (TESOL: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). From the extent and duration of its use, it is evidently considered a legitimate and indeed valued educational exercise.

Yet accounts abound of quite negative experiences for the participants, particularly by students or former students who do not feel they have benefited from having to read aloud themselves or from listening to their classmates do so: a 'public display of incompetence', as Erickson terms it (1987, cited by Mikulecky 1990: 149). Confusion, anxiety, embarrassment,

irritation and boredom are just some of the emotions reported by many children, and by adults with painful memories, in some cases from decades ago. Nor is it only the poorest readers who retain these negative associations with oral reading. Several teacher education colleagues interviewed for this research still recall the acute discomfort of even awaiting their turn to read aloud, let alone the actual reading, although they are (and were) skilled readers (personal communications); and Bruder and Biggs (1988: 737) note that it was the better readers among their interviewees who disliked the technique most.

One might therefore expect that teachers who choose to employ oral reading in their lessons would have clear reasons for the activity on each occasion. As a profession, we are usually fairly articulate about a range of educational practices, and in the current climate of accountability it would seem especially incumbent upon all practitioners to be able to provide a rationale for what they do. Unthinking adherence to routine or tradition is not generally favoured.

However, through over two decades of involvement in teacher education, sitting in on classes of many types, talking to teachers as well as trainee teachers about their approaches and discussing lessons they have organised, I have been struck both by how frequently reading aloud occurs throughout lessons, and by how rarely the value of this practice - in particular, oral reading by the learners - is explicitly discussed, much less questioned. Teachers will discuss **how** to conduct an oral reading activity - and the affective aspects for learners are clearly taken into account here - but very rarely **why** they are selecting this at a given point in a lesson. It has become in many cases a 'ritualistic' classroom activity (Goodman 1984), whose value appears to be largely regarded as self-evident.

For example, in lessons where there are written instructions or comprehension questions, students will typically be asked to read these out one by one as they are to be dealt with. Again, a lesson based on a written text, in both first- and second-language classes, very commonly begins with individual students each reading out a short section, often without any prior chance to find out what it is they will be reading about. Not surprisingly, this kind of reading may lack expressivity or indeed accuracy at a prosodic or even a phonemic level. Students also report that in those circumstances it is difficult for them to read out loud and at the same time

to understand what they are reading: their cognitive 'space' is too fully occupied with pronunciation issues to be able to attend to meaning as well. Yet when asked why this procedure has been used, even some otherwise very aware and articulate teachers will express surprise at the question, and admit that it just seemed 'the natural thing to do'. Of course, when pressed, they may in fact be able to make more explicit what has been only implicit until then, but it is still noteworthy that the utility of this practice has generally been so taken for granted.

One function for reading aloud is more accessible to the immediate awareness of many teachers: they believe they need to hear their students read regularly in order to monitor and assess their reading development and help them improve their reading skills. Support for this practice has clearly been provided by the long-standing decoding approach to the teaching of reading, and more recently by the now very extensive literature on 'miscue analysis' (e.g. Goodman 1973; Goodman & Goodman 1977), although even Goodman suggests this as an occasional rather than a frequent technique. Once again, however, when this view is probed further, teachers who engage in the practice may express uncertainty about the extent to which oral reading skills in fact reflect comprehension, or whether these are two quite separate skills. This doubt is noted by many writers: for instance:

> Pronouncing words is a process quite different from getting meaning. The surprising thing to some may be that the two processes may actually interfere with one another!
>
> (Latham & Sloan 1979: 70)

> Trevor [a pupil] taught us how high the wall is for inexperienced readers to climb into the enchanted garden; a wall, I feel, we build [...]. We learned most from these pupils where we expected to learn least: from their interaction with narrative texts. The slow oral production that they believe is reading is a kind of gripping grief to the well-practised listener.
>
> (Meek 1983b: 151-152)

Even quite severe doubts do not necessarily deter teachers from continuing the practice, however. Simons rather cynically observes:

> As a reading teacher I was in a somewhat similar position to those primitive societies that perform ritual ceremonies to make the rains

> come. They know that pouring water on the ground won't really open the heavens, but they have to do something.
> (Simons in Meek 1983a: 5)

Perhaps even more surprising (though not unconnected with the above) is the observation that many teachers and writers employ the word 'reading' in both senses - 'reading aloud' and 'reading for meaning' - without clearly signalling the drift back and forth; and one wonders whether they in fact notice the drift themselves. Certainly, when I have asked teachers a fairly neutral question such as: 'How are your students' reading skills coming along?', the answers have overwhelmingly shown that they interpret this to mean '**oral** reading skills'. They may for example note that their students 'can hardly put two words together yet' or conversely that they read 'just as well as the native-speakers in the class - clearly and smoothly and hardly make any mistakes'. The skill of comprehension is raised as a separate issue, even an afterthought, if they mention it at all (and many do not, but have to be prompted a few minutes later); for instance: 'They read very well . . . but of course they don't understand a word they read'.

Clearly the use of 'reading' in this sense of 'reading aloud' has come about because people have shortened the phrase to a single word for the sake of brevity and convenience. The problem however is the resultant slide between meanings, obscuring the distinction between 'retrieving **pronunciation** from text' and 'retrieving **meaning** from text' - a distinction which it will be argued later is a valuable one, although the research literature is somewhat divided on its precise nature. Or, to turn the issue around, the problem can be viewed not as two meanings of the word 'reading' collapsing into one but as an apparent split in the minds of many between 'reading' and 'comprehension'. This split is startling, for surely the prime function of reading in everyday life is to understand what we read, while reading aloud is a secondary skill and much less needed. In fact, the issue is far more complex than this, as is evidenced by the recent upsurge of interest in analysing and expanding the concept of literacy and its sociocultural determinants and implications: 'retrieving meaning from text' is only a part of what is necessary for 'understanding what we read', much less for fully critical literacy (e.g. Freebody & Luke 1990; Heath 1983, 1992; McKay 1993; Martin 1990). However, while noting that the critical literacy perspective provides the broad framework in which this thesis is placed, these notions will not be developed explicitly here.

In this study I will endeavour to use the term 'reading' consistently in the sense of 'reading for comprehension' or 'interpreting text'; and 'oral reading' or 'reading aloud' will be used when that secondary sense is meant.

That the term 'reading' has apparently been 'hijacked' for the less vital function of 'reading aloud/orally' is surprising and regrettable for the blurring of useful distinctions which it entails. That this drift in usage can have serious possible implications for the curriculum is of even greater concern. If educators consider reading for comprehension and reading orally as the same thing or at least as closely related, and if in fact they are not so interrelated, then those teachers will not have a clear conceptual framework for making crucial curricular decisions such as which activities to focus on, and when, and how much time to allocate to each, and how they complement or conflict with each other. Given the increasing complexity of the world for which teachers must help their learners to prepare, and the ever-evolving demands for additions to the curriculum, time spent on activities which do not contribute to learning in a coherent way is time lost to other potentially more important experiences. Even a helpful activity, if its purpose is misjudged, can be poorly utilised or even counterproductive.

A further cause for concern is that there is evidence to suggest that, for many learners, an emphasis on reading aloud, especially at the early stages - a crucially impressionable time - can create the perception that this is what reading is all about. Many researchers have found that beginner readers in general experience 'cognitive confusion' about the purposes, functions and mechanics of reading, and have very little precise notion of just what this activity 'reading' consists of (Downing 1969; Downing & Oliver 1973-74; Reid 1966; Vernon 1967); thus, their contacts with reading in their lives so far may suggest to them that reading aloud constitutes what reading is. Work by Pazzaglia et al. (1993) suggests that in the first two grades at school this confusion may persist, with at least a partial separation in the children's minds between decoding and comprehension; while other researchers (e.g. Bettelheim & Zelan 1981; Fagan 1988; Meek 1983a, 1983b) maintain that this state of affairs can continue well beyond the first few years of school. Reading, many students believe, serves to show they have got something right rather than to assist them to learn something useful (Evans 1993; Langer 1986) - and word recognition rather than overall understanding

often features in learners' descriptions of what they are trying to do (Arnold 1982). Of particular interest to the current study is the work of Devine (1984, 1988) with L2 adult learners: she found that the models of reading which learners held (in particular, sound-based versus meaning-based) crucially affected their ability to comprehend texts.

Moreover, if reading experience is negative - and in so many school settings having to read aloud must always seem like a test - and if learners have no rewarding reading experiences elsewhere, they may well resist learning to read and even grow to hate it. Reports abound of children exasperated with Round Robin (individual reading around the class) or similar experiences, declaring 'I hate reading' - and then disappearing for hours with a favourite book or the newspaper. These of course are not the ones we worry about. The learners who are of concern are those who have not discovered that reading can serve their own purposes for information or enjoyment, and for whom teachers therefore must ensure that encounters with text are always clearly meaningful, in every sense.

We have been talking thus far as if the only issue is the relationship between reading aloud and the more typical use to which we put reading in everyday life: reading for understanding. However, it is possible that reading aloud may serve useful purposes quite separate from comprehension, or that it is a valuable stepping-stone on the way to mature reading, even though it may not seem to have overt links to the most usual practices of skilled literacy. In the teaching of reading in the mainstream, for instance, the implication often seems to be that oral reading is a useful or even necessary step between being read to by others and becoming a skilled reader oneself. In the second-language classroom, on the other hand, reading aloud appears to be utilised very often for its connection with speech and specifically pronunciation, rather than as an adjunct to reading for comprehension as such. Again, however, its use in many cases is unreflective. It could well be that it is indeed a valuable avenue for fostering these skills in learners, but this must be explored rather than merely assumed or intuited.

It may be that the very ubiquitous nature of reading aloud causes this lack of questioning of its role. Bruder and Biggs (1988: 736) call it 'a fixture'; perhaps, like many such permanent aspects of our environment, it suffers from relative invisibility or 'wallpaper' status. Or again, it is conceivable

that its standing as apparently well-established and universally-accepted means that even those who have suffered under it do not usually question its value in education generally, but simply accept that they personally were 'no good at it'. Socialisation is a powerful force in all areas of our lives, to the point that we are often unaware of how it has shaped us to accept as 'normal' things which in fact should be subjected to reflective examination.

Teachers' classroom behaviours are shaped by their personal action theories of learning and teaching, which in many cases have evolved outside of their conscious awareness: in other words, they are often implicit, and unexamined, rather than explicit. Further, as many argue (e.g. Freeman & Richards 1996; Osterman and Kottkamp 1993; Woods 1996), the explicit, conscious or 'espoused' theories are generally less powerful in directing our behaviour than the implicit 'theories-in-use', those into which we have been acculturated unconsciously over time and which are thus less accessible to analysis and to change. While these can serve functional purposes in allowing us to operate on 'automatic pilot' for much of our everyday life, they can also lock us into habitual behaviours which are dysfunctional - unless we deliberately reflect upon them.

Osterman & Kottkamp go so far as to claim that 'educators are the most thoroughly socialised of all professional groups' (1993: 7). While one might not hold quite such a strong view, it is clear that teachers tend to have undergone a long 'apprenticeship of observation' - 13,000 hours in school and 3,060 days by the end of a bachelor's degree, according to one estimate (Bailey et al. 1996) - and thus a deep acculturation into particular pedagogical ways. Hence, we may be inclined to agree with Broughton et al. (1980: 89):

> It is a commonplace in teacher education that teachers tend to teach by the methods which were used by the teachers who taught them. In no area of language teaching is this more true than in that of reading.

Making implicit beliefs more available to conscious reflection has an important role to play in teachers' professional development, both by illuminating the choices they make among instructional practices (Burns 1993, 1996) and by providing vital insights into the conscious and unconscious lessons which our practices impose on learners (Cusworth 1995).

Given the above concerns, this study will focus on ESL students who are adults or young adults, and their teachers, to gauge their past and present experiences with oral reading and to survey their current beliefs about and attitudes to oral reading as a teaching/learning strategy. A further issue will be whether these attitudes can be related to a range of sociocultural factors such as age, sex, first language, educational background, English language proficiency, the setting in which they are studying or teaching, and learning/teaching style: factors which the L2 research literature (e.g. Brown 1980; Ellis 1994) indicates may affect the language learning process. These findings will be set in the context of the research and pedagogical literature on reading aloud, and implications will be drawn for further research, for TESOL classroom practice, and for TESOL professional development.

2.2 The aims of this study

This study addressed the following aims:

1. To critically evaluate the literature on reading aloud for L1 and L2 learners, in both the research and pedagogical domains, in order to ascertain where this practice fits into models and theories of reading, what empirical research has discovered about its effects on readers and their comprehension, how it has been used for learning purposes, and what attitudes are held towards oral reading by teachers and learners.

2. To explore the views of a number of ESL teachers on some of the strategies available to develop their learners' reading skills, and the specific purposes/students for which/whom they use these strategies.

3. To examine the ways the teachers report they use reading aloud in their classrooms - reading either by the students or by the teachers themselves - and the purposes which they consider these practices serve.

4. To explore the experiences of a number of teenage and adult ESL learners with a range of reading strategies, in particular reading aloud by themselves or others, and to ascertain their views about the value of these activities in their own learning of English.

5. To compare and contrast the range of opinions on reading aloud found among the teachers, the students, and between the teachers and students, in order to discover commonalities and differences.

6. To investigate whether any similarities or differences of attitude can be related to such factors as the following: differences between the teacher group and the learner group, age sex, first language, educational background, English language proficiency, length of time studying English in Australia, the setting in which the individual is currently studying/ teaching English, and learning/teaching styles.

7. To compare and contrast the findings of the current study with the relevant literature, in order to derive implications for future research, classroom pedagogy and ongoing teacher professional development.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY: PROCEDURES IN STUDYING TEACHER AND STUDENT ATTITUDES TO READING ALOUD

2.1 Overview

The aims of the study reported here were to begin to explore commonalities and differences between individual teachers and students in their attitudes to reading aloud in second-language learning and teaching. Woods (1996: 48) notes that ESL teachers can be thought of as a 'tribe' or subculture, with shared behaviours, concepts and language, and that ethnographic and ethnomethodological research procedures are thus appropriate for studying aspects of their subculture (by extension we may conceptualise ESL students as a 'tribe' also). This study did not attempt 'first order' research (Marton 1981), such as classroom observation, but focussed rather on a hermeneutic (Freeman 1996) or second-order (Marton 1981) perspective: what the teachers and students think and how they interpret their 'worlds'. The participants were all volunteers and the numbers were kept fairly low, as is not uncommon for this type of research, so that the researcher can spend time with each individual to explore their beliefs collaboratively with them, and hence to try to understand, interpret and explain these beliefs; not only commonalities and patterns but also individual differences are important.

The study therefore combined an extensive literature review with generally ethnographic research procedures: semi-structured interviews with the participants, questionnaires related to their learning/teaching style and a survey of their attitudes to the use of reading aloud in learning English. As this was a small-scale exploratory study, the findings will be suggestive rather than broadly generalisable. However, such heuristic research has an important role to play in opening up areas worthy of further investigation. In the view of many contemporary educational researchers, indeed, we may go further and assert that generalisability is not the only form of external validity worth capturing in a research project; provided procedures and constructs are sufficiently carefully described for the reader, comparability and translatability will allow useful comparisons to be made (Nunan 1992)

and reliability or 'trustworthiness' (Freeman 1996: 373; Merriam 1996) can be foundations for action.

It was decided to limit the research at this stage to interview and survey methods in order to emphasise the aspect of collegial interest in the views of fellow-practitioners and of students; observation of actual classroom practice could have seemed intrusive or potentially judgemental. It is acknowledged that interviews, questionnaires and surveys are also forms of intervention; that the very act of expressing one's ideas must shape or even create these to some degree; and that the relationship (in terms of both familiarity and power) between interviewer and interviewee will colour the data elicited, even to the extent of the interviewees telling the interviewer what they think s/he wants to hear (Block 1995; Nunan 1992). In this study, the researcher attempted to minimise these effects before the study by describing as explicitly as possible to each participant what the research agenda was and, during the interviews, by being interested and non-judgemental about all the comments made by the interviewees.

This chapter will begin with descriptions of selected characteristics of the teacher and student participants - characteristics from among those suggested by researchers as influencing L2 development in various ways, and which were therefore correlated with responses to the learning-style questionnaire and the reading-aloud survey. The descriptions of the participants will be followed by accounts of the methods used, first for data collection, and then for data analysis.

2.2 Participants

2.2.1 Number

The teachers and learners who participated in the study were all volunteers. There were seven teachers and 2[illegible] students in total. The numbers reflect the voluntary nature of the participation, as well as the heuristic intention of the study, as described above.

2.2.2 Age

The teachers ranged in age from their mid-twenties to their late forties.

The students' ages varied even more:

15-20 years	10
21-24 years	2
25-29 years	7
30-39 years	5
40+ years	1

The student age ranges were taken from a study by Willing (1988) whose learning-style survey instrument was adopted for the students in this study (see Appendix 6); this will be detailed in the Data Collection sub-section of this chapter.

2.2.3 Sex

All seven teachers were female. Of the students, sixteen were female and seven were male.

2.2.4 First language

All the teachers except two were native speakers of English. The other two teachers were fluent bilinguals with native-like English language skills; they had migrated to Australia as young children and spoke another European language as their first language.

The students had a variety of first languages: Indonesian (5 speakers); Japanese (4); Thai (4); Hmong/Thai (1); Mandarin (3); Cantonese (1); Vietnamese (2); Mongolian (1); Korean (1); and Turkish (1).

The three Mandarin speakers all came from the People's Republic of China; the Cantonese speaker from Hong Kong; and the Hmong speaker had been educated in the Thai educational system.

2.2.5 Educational background

All the teachers had been educated in Australia, and had degrees in a range of areas (mostly languages). Most of them also had completed or were enrolled in specialist postgraduate qualifications in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

The students, not surprisingly, had more varied educational levels, reached in their non-English-speaking countries of origin, and most were about to continue their studies in Australia. Three were still at high school; five had completed high school only; fourteen had completed a first degree; and one had completed a postgraduate degree.

2.2.6 Students' English language proficiency

It was not possible to obtain detailed information about all the students' English language proficiency at the time of the study, as not all had TOEFL or IELTS scores; so despite its potential value, this factor can not be studied directly here. However, the following sub-sections - number of years studying English, highest level of prior English study, and length of time in current course - provide information which gives some indication of the range of proficiencies in English.

2.2.7 Years of English in country of origin

This was highly variable. Two students had no prior English study; five had between one and three years; seven had three to six years; six had seven to ten years; and three had more than ten years English study in their country of origin before coming to Australia. In one of the latter cases, the student had had some schooling in an English-medium preschool; the rest had learnt English only in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

2.2.8 Highest level of English study before this course

Students varied considerably on this measure also. While two had no prior English study, three had learnt English only in junior high school, six had

studied English throughout high school, and twelve had taken some English during their first degree.

2.2.9 Months in current course

Six had been studying in their current English course in Australia for only one or two months; fourteen had been in their course for between three and six months; two for seven to twelve months; and one for over twelve months.

2.2.10 The setting

The participants were all living and learning/teaching English in a small city in Australia. Within this environment, they came from two different learning settings:

1. The larger group (six teachers, fifteen students - eight female and seven male) was working full-time in a specialist English language centre attached to a university. Students in this group were in Australia for a variety of their own study purposes ranging from short General English courses (one student in this research), through students intending to enrol in local high schools (three), to those in an English for Further Study course who were planning to study at university (eleven).

2. The smaller group (one teacher, eight students - all female) belonged to a community-based class which met three times a week for two hours each time. The women students in this group had mostly accompanied their post-graduate-student husbands to Australia, and were studying English in order to socialise and to take care of their families in this community.

Appendix 1 provides a little more detail on these two settings and their personnel.

2.2.11 Learning/teaching style

This factor was included in the study as it is currently much under discussion in both the literature and the TESOL profession for its possible effects on teaching practice and the ways in which learners respond differentially to various learning activities and situations (e.g. Ellis 1994; Stevick 1989; Williams & Burden 1997; Willing 1988). It was measured using several different instruments, detailed in the Data Collection sub-section of this chapter and in Appendices 4, 5 and 6. One set of instruments was generally linked to the Kolb Learning Style Inventory (Kolb 1976, 1984a) (Appendix 5 contains both the scale and background information), which in the case of students was mediated through Willing's questionnaire (1988) (see Appendix 6; also discussion in section 2.3.4 below). The other instrument used was a short version of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Briggs-Myers & Myers 1980) (Appendix 4, which also includes some explanatory material): not all students did the MBTI, however, owing to disparate English language levels. Although it was not possible to obtain fully comparable data for all groups, as will be explained in that later section, it is interesting to note at this stage the following general tendencies.

2.2.11.1 Teachers

On the Kolb Inventory, which categorises each individual as one global 'type', four of the seven teachers came out as Convergers, with one in each of the other three categories: Assimilator, Accommodator, and Diverger. While Kolb asserts that all types are equally 'good' and that their strengths complement one another, the Converger type which values generalisation (theory) together with active experimentation would be valuable in the current Australian TESOL profession, where teachers are expected to develop a clear conceptual framework and to work relatively autonomously in the sense of planning their own programs rather than simply using published textbooks. It would not be surprising to find that, as Kolb (1984b) has found in a number of studies, an organisational culture developed favouring this combination. Indeed, all the Convergers came from the language centre, and the Accommodator, also from the centre, shared with the Convergers a strength in active experimentation. Moreover, the Diverger, whose type could be seen as diametrically opposed to the Convergers, had by chance completed a Kolb Inventory two years before, prior to joining the centre; her previous rating had been an extremely

strong Diverger, but in this study she had moved a lot closer to her Converger colleagues.

On the MBTI, the individual is 'scored' on each of four dimensions: Introvert/Extrovert, Sensing/Intuiting, Thinking/Feeling, and Judging/Perceiving. There were equal numbers of Introvert and Extrovert types (3 + 1/2 each) (the 1/2 figure arises where an individual is equally balanced between the two extremes on the scale); and then a preponderance of Feeling (5 + 1/2), Judging (4 + 2x1/2), and especially Sensing (5 + 2x1/2), types.

All the Convergers were also Judgers and Sensers. According to the descriptions of the types provided by the instrument creators, Convergers, like Judgers, tend to prefer clear-cut situations and to get things settled and finished - what Willing (1988: 68) calls 'the efficient application of ideas' - and, like Sensers, prefer to reach a conclusion step-by-step through hypothetical-deductive reasoning. The connections between other traits, however, were more mixed and inconclusive. Further discussion can be found in the Results chapter.

2.2.11.2 Students

On the Kolb/Willing scale, the students were preponderantly (14 out of a possible 23) Accommodators (Communicative in Willing's terms), with five Assimilators (Authority-oriented), two Convergers (Analytical) and two Divergers (Concrete). It is probably not surprising to find so many Accommodators among these overseas students: Accommodators are characterised as active, valuing new experiences, and prepared to take risks: all traits which one might expect in a person who travels overseas to study or to support a student family-member.

Among those students who completed the Myers-Briggs scale (n=15), the following groups predominated:

	Extroverts	12
	Sensers	10
and to some extent:	Judgers	8+3x1/2

Of the ten student Accommodators who also filled in the Myers-Briggs survey, five were at once Extrovert, Sensing and Judging: seven were both

Extroverts and Sensers, seven were Judgers (and three were balanced between Judging/Perceiving). Some connections between these types are as might be expected: for example, the risk-taking, trial-and-error aspects of the Accommodator type fit well with the Extrovert's liking for variety and quick action, and the Judger's preference for rapid decisions. A preference for Sensing (as opposed to Intuiting) suggests a preparedness to trust the information which comes through the senses, which would be helpful in many ways in language learning. On the other hand, some traits appear to be in conflict: Sensers are said to dislike new problems unless there are established ways of doing them, and enjoy using skills already mastered rather than learning new ones, which is at variance with the above characteristics of Accommodators. More detail is included in the Results chapter.

In this section we have to some extent anticipated the next section, which will give greater detail on the way some of the above data was collected, as well as the instruments used.

2.3 Data collection

2.3.1 The Researcher-Interviewer

The researcher-interviewer has been involved in TESOL and TESOL teacher education for 25 years, in Australia and Europe. She was known before the study to several of the participating teachers as a lecturer with whom they had studied or as a TESOL colleague, but had not previously met any of the students. The prior relationship with some of the teachers - and the lack of prior relationship with the other interviewees - may have shaped some of the responses, as noted early in this chapter; similarly, the asymmetrical balance of 'power' between interviewer and interviewee was a potential source of bias. However, as mentioned before, pains were taken to explain the purpose of the research to all the participants beforehand, and to convince them during the interview that their experiences and attitudes (rather than any 'right answers') were of interest and value, in order to make the interviewees feel relaxed and willing to share their ideas as directly as possible.

2.3.2 General Procedure

As noted earlier, all the participants were volunteers. The teachers were approached in the first instance through their institutions, and they then invited interested students to participate. The researcher attended a class at each institution to meet the students and clarify the project's aims and what would be involved. Each intending participant then received an explanatory sheet describing the study and a consent form (Appendix 2: Teachers; Appendix 3: Students), as well as the learning-style questionnaires (Appendices 4 and 5: Teachers; Appendices 4 and/or 6: Students), which they were asked to fill in and bring to the interview.

The method chosen combined these learning-style questionnaires (completed in the participants' own time), with semi-structured interviews, and a short written survey administered at the end of each interview. The interviews (30-45 minutes for the teachers, 20-30 minutes for the students, and tape-recorded for later analysis) ranged over a considerable number of issues related to reading before coming, as naturally as possible, to the topic of oral reading. In this way it was hoped to elicit the participants' more spontaneous views and ideas on oral reading both in the context of reading generally, as well as in its own right, before dealing directly with this issue. The surveys followed up on this by quite explicitly and directly focussing only on aspects of reading aloud The interviews and the surveys therefore provide slightly differing but largely complementary perspectives on the participants' experiences of and attitudes to reading aloud.

For the students and teachers at the language centre, interviews were held at the centre during teaching hours or at lunchtime; for the community class, interviews took place either just before or just after the class, in the room where the class was held, or in the women's homes at a time nominated by them. For many of these women, it seemed that a visit to their homes from an Australian was something of a special occasion, and the researcher was very touched by their welcomes, especially as she felt it was she who was asking a favour of them.

2.3.3 Procedure: The Teachers

The teachers filled in two questionnaires prior to the interviews to gauge their learning/teaching styles: a version of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

(Appendix 4) and the Kolb Learning Style Inventory (Appendix 5). These were later 'scored' to determine the style or type, and returned to the teachers with explanatory material. They were also analysed for any links between learning/teaching style and other data from the interviews or questionnaires (biographical, or related to teaching practices and attitudes): see Data Analysis section for detail.

The interviews were of the ethnographic variety, semi-structured around a set of open-ended questions (Appendix 7) which were asked of all the teachers, but in a relatively informal way, indicating collegial interest. This method was chosen to make it clear that no one 'correct' approach was expected, and hence to encourage relatively honest descriptions of practice and points of view.

The questions first asked the interviewees to state what they considered to be the characteristics of a 'good reader', to see if oral reading was mentioned at all in this regard, and then explored their teaching practices and preferences more generally. Towards the end, the interview focussed explicitly on oral reading - by teacher or students - and then finished with a brief survey of the teacher's views on oral reading (see below).

During the interview, initial answers were often probed further to elicit detail or clarification, or to foster deeper reflection by the interviewee, while endeavouring to have minimal impact on the views they held, and certainly not to appear to be critical of these views. The researcher was thus very 'present' in the interviews, while at the same time trying not to constrain the direction the interview might take or to 'lead' the answers unduly. Extracts from some transcripts are to be found in Appendix 11.

Towards the end of the interview, the teachers also filled in a survey form on their use of reading aloud in their TESOL practice (Appendix 8). Unlike the rest of the interview, which was very open-ended, this survey asked the teachers to indicate their responses to a number of statements on a series of closed Likert scales. The items touched on such issues as the extent to which they used oral reading in their teaching, whether they thought students liked the practice or found it useful, and whether the students understood what they were reading as they read it orally. Here again, the teachers were able to elaborate on their answers if they wished.

2.3.4 Procedure: The Students

It had originally been intended that the students would complete the same two learning-style questionnaires as the teachers, to allow a contrastive analysis of styles between the teachers and their students. However, the language of these two instruments, especially the Kolb Inventory, is quite abstract and demanding, even for native-speakers, possibly leading to a confounding effect because of either misunderstanding of the meanings of terms or anxiety at their complexity. Moreover, it was important that the students not feel that the intention was to test their reading skills but rather that it was indeed to seek their opinions.

After discussion with the teachers, therefore, it was decided that the language of the Kolb Inventory would be too difficult for all the students; it was replaced by the questionnaire used by Ken Willing in his survey of learning styles for the Australian Adult Migrant Education Program, which he indicates was devised to tap the same dimensions as the Kolb scale (Willing 1988: 67-70) (Appendix 6). Its questions were in full-sentence form, much more straight-forward than the list of terms in the Kolb, and had already been trialled in Willing's research, so they seemed more approachable for these students. In addition, there were questions eliciting some biographical data for each student. Although such a substitution may not permit an exact cross-matching of styles, Willing (1988: 68-69) does link his styles and those of Kolb using terms such as 'correspond' and 'a close similarity', so it was felt that at least some comparisons between teachers and students would be possible. Indeed, on occasion, Kolb's terms have been used in this study for students as well as teachers, in order to make such comparisons without the complicating factor of dual terminology.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is a little more accessible in its language than the Kolb, but is still somewhat abstract and hypothetical. It was thus retained for the students at the Language centre - and they were also able to ask for explanation where needed - but was not used with the Community group because of the latter's generally lesser familiarity with English. In effect, this means that the information obtained from this particular measure can only provide very limited data for the current study, though it may suggest directions for further research.

Apart from the above variations, the students underwent a similar procedure to the teachers. They filled in the learning-style questionnaires (two for the Language centre students; one only for the Community class students); brought these to the interviews, which were semi-structured around a set of open-ended questions (Appendix 9); and at the end of the interview completed a Likert-scale survey on their experience of and attitudes towards reading aloud in their language learning, particularly English (Appendix 10). They too were encouraged to reflect and elaborate on their initial responses where possible, and to see their views as valuable.

Extracts from some transcripts from the student interviews are included in Appendix 12. The learning-style questionnaires were returned to the students with their interpretation and some explanatory material.

2.4. Data Analysis

2.4.1 Interviews

The interviews were analysed in detail, mainly for their content, and especially for recurrent themes related to reading aloud, and individual experiences with and attitudes towards this practice. The language of the interviews was also examined for certain discourse markers, in particular to gauge how definite or otherwise were the views expounded. These themes and perspectives will be recounted in the Results chapter; some transcript extracts are to be found, as already noted, in Appendices 11 and 12 (where transcription codes used are also detailed).

2.4.2 Learning-style questionnaires and reading-aloud surveys

The responses to the learning-style questionnaires and the reading-aloud surveys were coded and entered into the Statview program for statistical analysis, along with all the biographical data for each respondent. Since the number of participants was relatively small, and the spread of 'raw scores' for such items as age, months in Australia, years of prior study and learning-style attributes was quite wide, it was decided to group the scores for the various data sets and convert these into codes for analysis. The coded data is in Appendix 13, along with an explanation of the codes used.

Because the sample size in this study was comparatively small (n=30), it was not possible to use inferential statistical tests of association to examine the relationships between variables such as age and sex of respondents and response patterns to particular questions. For example, commonly used tests of association between ordinal variables such as the Chi-Squared test require that no more than 20% of the cell frequencies in the two-way contingency tables be less than five (5) (Kirk 1978). This requirement would not be met in any of the two-way tables of association that could be formed in this study. Consequently, the statistical analysis has been limited to a descriptive account of cell frequencies which are broadly indicative of association between variables.