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Ludic Language: The Case of the Punning Echoic Allusion

Abstract

This paper is concerned with punning echoic allusion. First, a distinction is drawn between common parlance senses of allusion (vague reference) and the literary idea of echoic allusion (cryptic quotation). It is then shown that echoic allusion involves play with multiple meanings in the manner of a pun and, like the pun, is highly dependent for its effect on the fact that the potential polysemy of individual words at the level of *langue* is only disambiguated at the level of *parole* by both situational and linguistic context. Examples of allusions based on verbatim quotation are compared to perfect puns, while allusions based on non-verbatim quotation are compared to imperfect puns. Grice's (1975) model of comprehension of indirect language is then modified and expanded to chart the processes by which readers (and listeners) understand punning echoic allusion. Finally, the possible motivations writers may have for punning echoic allusion are considered.

Key words

Allusion; echoic; intertextual; inference; ludic; pun; quotation

1. Non-echoic and echoic allusion distinguished

In common parlance the word 'allusion' may be used in various senses. In its widest sense it may be used to mean any brief or passing reference, direct or indirect (Bloom 1975: 126). It may also be used, however, to mean an indirect reference or hint (Ben-Porat 1976, Perri 1978, Coombs 1984). In this sense an allusion involves a speaker or writer choosing a vague referential term in place of a more specific one so that the reader is apparently 'kept guessing' for a moment. Coombs (1984: 475) gives the following example:

Fifne went off in a cab, as we have known more exalted persons of her nation to do under similar circumstances: but more provident or lucky than these, she secured not only her own property, but some of her mistress's ...
(Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* 1848/1968: 632–633)

In this passage the vague reference “more exalted persons of her nation” is generally taken to be an allusion to Louis Philippe, who reputedly fled Paris in a cab in the 1848 revolution. This was a topical allusion at the time of writing and was unlikely to be missed by Thackeray’s readers.

The above example is, however, not an echoic allusion (Coombs 1984: 475). An echoic allusion is what is sometimes, rather misleadingly, called a ‘literary allusion’. This is misleading because echoic allusions are firstly not limited to literary works nor are all allusions in literary works of the echoic variety, as witness the Louis Philippe example. The echoic allusion is closely linked to the pun. Indeed, the Classical rhetorical figure or trope *allusio* meant word-play (Hollander 1981: 63), and although the earliest recorded meaning of ‘allusion’ in English is that of ‘illusion’, by the early Renaissance it had acquired the meaning of ‘word-play’ or ‘pun’, and by about 1600 was also being used more generally for any form of symbolic comparison such as allegory, parable or metaphor (*Oxford English Dictionary*, volume 1, 1989: 349). It is these now obsolete meanings of ‘allusion’ which are actually most important for understanding how echoic allusion works in the manner of a pun.

In echoic allusion, rather than one referent replacing another, a secondary associative level of meaning is set up by means of cryptic quotation. More precisely, a secondary reference to a text *in absentia* is established and the reader has to supply the relevant associations which it bears for the text *in praesentia*. According to Hermerén (1992: 212) in echoic allusion the writer intends to remind the reader of another text and, furthermore, wants the reader to recognise this intention. He or she therefore puts selected features of the source text into the text being written and relies on the reader’s familiarity with the two texts and the genres and traditions to which they belong for the allusion to be taken, even though the two texts are quite unconnected. Nevertheless, the writer accepts that not all readers will necessarily take the allusion.

In this connection, Leppihalme (1994: 179) defined echoic allusion as “the use of pre-formed language or names to convey implicit meaning.” One example of echoic allusion she gives is from David Lodge’s novel *Nice Work*, in which a character says: “Where are they now, the Hillman Imps of yesteryear? In the scrapyards, every one, or nearly” (Lodge, *Nice Work* 1988: 11). Leppihalme (1994: 178) actually identified two echoic allusions here: “Where are they now, the Hillman Imps of yesteryear?” echoes “Where are the snows of yesteryear?” (Francois Villon, *Le Grand Testament*, 1461: ‘Ballades des dames jadis’), in the translation of Dante Gabriele Rossetti. “In the scrapyards, every one, or nearly” echoes the line “In the graveyards, every one” from the song, ‘Where have all the Flowers Gone?’ (1961) written by Pete Seeger (*Oxford Concise Dictionary of*

Quotations 1993: 269). Native speakers consulted by Leppihalme were more or less able to identify the sources and thought the implied meaning was nostalgia for bygone youth, innocence and naiveté, together with perhaps a touch of ironic, wry humour.

Echoic allusion has been described by literary scholars as a form of quotation. Meyer (1961: 15), for example, saw echoic allusions as cryptic or veiled quotations. They are, however, more properly, a sort of anti-quotation in that they break either one or both of the two crucial requirements for strict quotation, namely of being, firstly, verbatim with reference to their source texts and, secondly, discrete with reference to the host texts (Morawski 1970: 691). The echoic allusion may be cryptic in various ways; it will often be morphologically modified so as to incorporate it syntactically into the host text; it is frequently not set off from the host text by quotation marks or other means; its source is normally not given; it may be fragmentary, discontinuous or interspersed with non-allusive language. Often the original quotation will have been deliberately changed at the lexicogrammatical level for rhetorical effect. If it is preserved in verbatim form, then it will inevitably have undergone some measure of semantic shift in its new context and often this semantic shift will be considerable so that there is a measure of word play involved. It is in these ways that the quotation is cryptic and the allusion is echoic.

In literary writing the tradition of allusion by means of intentional echo can be traced back at least to Greek and Latin Classical poetry. Among the rhetorical figures of speech in Classical poetry was *imitatio auctorum*, or the reverent imitation of a great poet, which could easily become *aemulatio*, or the attempt to improve on the great poet (Conte 1986: 37). *Imitatio* might necessarily involve modification of the original quotation to integrate it syntactically and semantically into its new context. *Aemulatio* would necessarily require tampering with the original in order to improve it. However, alongside this reverent tradition of imitation there was also a tradition of irreverent imitation, which played with an original and manifested itself in such literary forms as parody, travesty, burlesque and pastiche (Bakhtin 1981). It is actually this subversive ludic tradition which is more relevant for an understanding of the punning echoic allusions to be discussed in this paper. Clearly the Hillman Imp example from David Lodge, above, belongs to this tradition of parody.

2. Allusive puns and punning allusions

Punning is clearly related to echoic allusion in that both devices trigger two meanings, a primary and a secondary meaning (Mitchell 1978: 226). Echoic allusion is essentially concerned with playing with the semantics of the word and the pragmatics of the sentence. Nord (1990: 17) pointed out that the writer not only reproduces the form (or certain features of the form) of a short text segment, but also adapts its meaning to the new context. This results in intertextual punning or

word play, achieved by displacing the quotation from its original context, possibly modifying it formally and then so integrating it into the host text that it takes on a double meaning in the manner of a pun. Its primary meaning is determined by the host text but the secondary meaning it bore in its source text is also activated and interacts with the primary meaning.

Just as echoic allusions may vary along a scale from verbatim quotation to vague echoes of a source, so puns may be more or less perfect. Hockett (1977) developed the distinction between perfect and more or less imperfect puns. One of his many examples is the following punning joke:

“Tough luck,” said the egg in the monastery, “out of the frying pan into the friar.” (Hockett 1977: 259)

According to Hockett (1977: 262) this joke involves a perfect pun (on ‘friar’ and ‘fryer’) as well as an imperfect pun (on either ‘friar’ or ‘fryer’ and ‘fire’). He explained the difference between a perfect and an imperfect pun as follows:

A *blend* is what a speaker produces, often by way of a slip of the tongue, if he tries to say two words or phrases at the same time. If the two just happen to be identical in phonological shape (as are ‘friar’ and ‘fryer’), then the effort can succeed, and the blend is a *perfect pun*. Otherwise, what actually comes out can at most be composed of ingredients drawn from each of the two target words or phrases (Lewis Carroll’s *Richard* and *William* yielding *Rilchiam*); but as long as the hearer can detect both of the targets it is still a pun, though an *imperfect* one. A great variety of contaminations, assimilations and metatheses can be shown to be the result of blending, and all can occur, by intent rather than accident, in a wisecrack or joke.

(Hockett, 1977: 262, footnote 6)

Hockett was considering spoken language, where homophony satisfies the condition for a perfect pun. However, for puns in the written mode, one might suggest the stricter criterion of homonymy, namely that the perfect pun must activate two or more targets which are both homographs and homophones. Furthermore, Hockett’s definition needs to be extended to cover those cases where two or more meanings of a polysemous word are activated, rather than two homonyms. The distinction between polysemy and homonymy is actually by no means clear cut anyway since what today are homonyms may have started out from a common origin, for example, ‘bank’ of a river and ‘bank’ in the financial sense.

Wilss (1989: 3) distinguished between puns and allusions in terms of *langue* and *parole*. His idea was that puns play with two lexicalised meanings, usually of a single word, whereas allusions play with phrasal meaning, which is determined by context. However, in practice, this distinction is not as tidy as it might appear. It is a feature of language that it under-exploits the word combinations permitted by its grammar and prefers certain formulations for expressing certain meanings

in certain situations (Pawley and Syder 1983, Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992). Threadgold (1987, volume 2: 553) noted that, in time, repeated co-occurrence of certain lexical items to express particular meanings become established in the language and in the mental lexicon of members of that speech community. There thus emerge “dominant discourse patterns” in a speech community.

Even before the text is encountered, reader (or listener) expectations are established by the extra-textual context. The skilled language user has knowledge of different text types and the language or register associated with them. This knowledge functions to insulate a text against the intrusion of unwanted meanings. During the actual process of reading or listening, people are also sensitive to the co-occurrence patterns of words and match these against their stored knowledge of form-meaning pairings at the phrasal level. The intra-textual context of the unfolding text therefore primes certain meanings of each word as it is encountered and other meanings are suppressed (Lemke 1985). In this way, situation, topic and the unfolding linguistic context itself function to foreground certain word meanings and background others, so that many potentially distracting ambiguities are never allowed to intrude into the consciousness of the communicators. This restriction of meaning potential was termed “the idiom principle” by Sinclair (1987: 320).

Nevertheless, in a sense the meaning of each word is redefined anew each time it is encountered. Word meanings are dynamic rather than static, flexible rather than rigid. The potential ambiguity of word meaning is resolved only in context. Most words are more or less polysemous, and in combination with other words create meanings not necessarily predictable from the meanings of the individual words in isolation. In punning and alluding, speakers and writers may exploit this feature of language to deliberately prime secondary meanings in addition to the primary meaning. For this reason, Leech (1969: 209) defined a pun as “a foregrounded lexical ambiguity”.

Double meaning links allusion to the pun. The distinction between a pun and an echoic allusion is illustrated in the following lines from Hilaire Belloc’s poem ‘On his Books’ (1923), which actually contain a pun embedded within an echoic allusion:

When I am dead I hope it may be said:

“His sins were scarlet, but his books were read.”

(Hilaire Belloc, ‘On his Books’, 1923)

“His sins were scarlet but his books were read” is an echoic allusion to Isaiah 1.8, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow”. The allusion may be viewed as a piece of intertextual word-play, a weak pun at the sentence level. It belongs to the irreverent tradition of parody of an authority, in this case parody of the Bible. Within the allusive piece of language, however, there is a pun at the word level: ‘read’ puns on its homophone ‘red’, which intrudes on the reader’s consciousness, even if he or she misses the Biblical allusion, because it has been primed by its near synonym ‘scarlet’. However, the reader who has

recalled the Biblical quotation will be doubly reminded of the pun, since ‘white’ will also prime ‘red’. This is a near-perfect pun, since ‘red’ and ‘read’ are homophones, although not homographs.

The couplet will be understood differently according to whether the reader takes the allusion or not. For the reader who misses the allusion, the pun on ‘red’ and ‘read’ will just be seen as a piece of facetious humour which contributes nothing to the meaning of the text *in praesentia*. For the reader who recognises the allusion, however, the Biblical quotation *in absentia* does contribute a secondary level of meaning to the line, suggesting that a writer’s works may in some sense redeem his personal shortcomings. This links into the piece of received cultural knowledge that writers may achieve immortality through their works, an idea which if expressed directly rather than allusively would be far too pompous for Belloc. The allusion is therefore in Lachmann’s (1983) sense *sinnkonstituierend* because it contributes to the meaning of the text *in praesentia*.

Crystal (1998: 101–105) suggested that the pun demands only linguistic knowledge of the reader while the echoic literary allusion relies heavily on cultural knowledge as well. He suggested that intermediate points on the scale would be occupied by allusions to lexicalised quotations, proverbial expressions and the like, since they represent lexicalised cultural knowledge. Crystal, in contrast to Wilss (1989), thus saw a gradational rather than a categorical distinction between puns and allusions. However, the boundary between linguistic and cultural knowledge itself turns out to be rather fuzzier than Crystal would imply. What is an allusion to a quotation for one reader may be a pun on a lexicalised phrase for another. This is because frequent allusion to a specific target quotation may lead to its being lexicalised in the language. For example, Max Beerbohm’s description of radio as a “pot of message” echoes Chapter 25 of *Genesis* in the Geneva Bible, 1560, “Esau selleth his birthright for a mess of potage (sic)” and for erudite readers will be an echoic allusion (Armstrong 1945: 218–219). For others it will be a piece of word play since the phrase has become lexicalised. *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1977: 822) defines it as “a material advantage accepted for something of higher worth, as by Esau (*Genesis* 25.29ff.).” Sometimes an original quotation will be forgotten and a later allusion to it will become better known. For example, Margaret Thatcher once said “The lady’s not for turning” and this quotation has become better known to many people than the title of Christopher Fry’s play *The Lady’s not for Burning* (1949) to which she alluded (*Wordsworth Dictionary of Quotations* 1997: 535). It is, of course, too early to say whether it will become a lexicalised phrase.

Puns which play with a lexicalised phrase rather than a single word, even where no quotation is involved, are often highly culture-bound and demand not only linguistic but also cultural knowledge if they are to be understood. It is therefore doubtful whether the separation of linguistic and cultural knowledge is a workable distinction for marking off puns from allusions, as Crystal (1998) would have it. Consider for example:

Into injury time – for life (*Daily Telegraph*, 2.9.1995: 18, headline)

This punning headline headed a report about the dangers of chronic injury resulting from children overtraining for sports. ‘Injury time’ will initially be understood by the reader in its lexicalised sense as meaning the playing time added on to games such as football to compensate for time lost during play because of attending to injured players. However, this initial meaning will then be deconstructed by the unfolding text *in praesentia* and the reader will have to reinterpret the phrase in a novel manner to mean something like ‘time spent being (chronically) injured’, without dismissing the initial meaning, which now becomes secondary rather than primary. (It underlines the fact that the chronic injuries referred to in the article cannot be quickly cured in a few minutes of treatment so that the game can go on.) The two meanings interact, rather than the lexicalised meaning being replaced by the nonce meaning. The pun is at the level of *parole* rather than *langue*, since a lexicalised meaning and a nonce meaning are involved. The context *in praesentia* and the context *in absentia* interact in the manner of an echoic allusion, even though there is no source quotation. The allusion is situational, the reference is to a secondary script. Two contexts, one for each meaning of the word to be punned on, are primed.

Contextual priming is very important in the genre of punning jokes (jokes with a *double entendre*). Freud (1905/1960: 46) gave various examples, one of which is the following, topical at the time of the Dreyfus affair:

“The girl reminds me of Dreyfus. The army doesn’t believe in her innocence.”

This is a perfect pun on ‘innocence’, but it has an allusive element in that alongside the overt reference to the Dreyfus affair, in which the legal meaning of ‘innocence’ applies, there is an implied imaginary situation *in absentia* in which the sexual meaning of ‘innocence’ would obtain. In fact two separate scripts are set up in two separate contexts (triggered by the separate associations of ‘girl’ + ‘innocence’ and ‘Dreyfus’ + ‘innocence’). Each script primes a different meaning of ‘army’, too (‘soldiers’ in the ‘girl’-script versus ‘generals’ in the ‘Dreyfus’-script).

Many weak phrasal puns may be viewed as an allusion to some sort of set phrase *in absentia* (Marino 1988: 42; Alexander 1980: 163). The method is to achieve maximal semantic change with minimal phonological change. The target may be a lexicalised quotation, as in Queen Elizabeth II’s description of the year 1992, when the marital problems of her children had caused her great adverse publicity, as an *annus horribilis* (reported in the *Times* 25.11.1992: 3). This neologism clearly puns on or alludes to the *annus mirabilis* or year of wonders, which has become a lexicalised phrase in English, but was also the title of a poem by Dryden (1666). Weak phrasal puns often depend on set phrases which have no source in a quotation, but the method of slot and filler substitution is still the

same, as in the *Independent*, 12.9.1995:1, which described a meeting as “short and sour”, with obvious allusion to the set phrase “short and sweet”.

3. Forms of punning echoic allusion

Even verbatim echoic allusions to literary sources, complete with quotation marks, may function in the manner of a pun. The following example hinges on a perfect pun at the word level and is taken from a reader’s letter to the *Times*. It may be compared in its method to allusive puns such as the Dreyfus example above:

I consider this “the most unkindest cut of all”. (Times, 12.9.1995: 17, letters to the editor)

In this example the writer, an 81 year-old man, is complaining about having to pay capital gains tax on the investments he has been forced to sell in order to pay for nursing home care for his wife, who suffers from Alzheimer’s disease. The phrase in quotation marks is a verbatim quotation from Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, III, iii, 188. In its new context, however, the quotation takes on a completely new meaning. This semantic shift is based on the pun on ‘cut’. It is a perfect pun. In this case, as in the example from Freud, above, the effect is one of double meaning at the phrasal level.

In other cases the allusive chunk of discourse may differ lexico-grammatically from the target quotation. If lexico-semantic manipulation is employed, it will often involve minimal formal change with maximum semantic shift, for example by substituting a similar sounding word with a very different meaning, in the manner of a weak pun. In such cases, the punning allusion functions in the manner of a deliberately distorted echo, often with humorously grotesque effects. These perlocutionary effects may contribute to various aspects of pragmatic meaning, especially irony, parody and satire. Yet the modified quotation must nevertheless still remind the reader of the wording of the underlying quotation in its original context, otherwise the allusion will be lost. In the following newspaper heading to an article about gardening in the winter months the allusion hinges on a weak pun at the word level:

When your tiny land is frozen (Daily Mail, 24.2.96: 1947, headline)

This alludes to the line “Your tiny hand is frozen” in Act I of *La Bohème*, music by Puccini, libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica (1896) (*Oxford Concise Dictionary of Quotations*: 150). The words ‘hand’ and ‘land’ differ phonologically only in terms of the initial phoneme, but the meaning of the whole phrase is transformed.

Sometimes the weak pun may not be limited to a single word, but may extend over a phrase. An example from a newspaper headline is:

They're guarding the change at Buckingham Palace (*Daily Telegraph*, 12.9.1995: 6, headline)

The headline is to a consumer survey which reported that Buckingham Palace is Britain's most overpriced tourist attraction and the allusion is to "They're changing the guard at Buckingham Palace", the first line of the refrain in A. A. Milne's poem for children, 'Buckingham Palace' (1924). Here a weak phrasal pun is created by the permutation of 'guard' and 'change' while maintaining the syntax, prosody and rhythm of the original because the 'ing' suffix does not move with 'change' but attaches itself to 'guard'. The meaning is of course completely transformed with minimal formal change.

Provided the prosody and rhythm of the original are not disturbed, allusion can be achieved by similar sounding phrases (phonological play), as in the next example:

...if he needs a slogan, he should look no further than Shakespeare's "King Richard III", Act I, Scene I: "Now is there discount / On our winter rent". (*Daily Telegraph* 12.9.1995: 21)

This is taken from a newspaper report of an estate agent who was fighting a slump in the housing market by announcing a 'sale' of properties on his books. The original is, of course, "Now is the winter of our discontent." In this case the allusion takes on the form of a deliberate misquotation, complete with quotation marks and exact reference to the source.

There are other echoic allusions which retain an element of language play not at the phonological level but at the semantic level, by exploiting the structural relations in the lexicon. In the next example this involves substituting one colour word for another:

Paint it Green (*New York Post*, headline, reported in *Spiegel*, 25.01.1999: 104)

This headline broke the news that Jerry Hall was suing Mick Jagger for divorce to the tune of 50 million dollars. On the face of it the headline bears no relation to the news item reported, at least no direct relation. Most readers will, however, perceive it as a punning allusion to the title of the Rolling Stones song "Paint it Black". The substitution of 'green' for 'black' is semantically motivated and is presumably to be taken as an allusion to the fifty million dollars, with 'green' being metonymic for 'greenbacks'.

Interestingly, in 2000, when Luciana Morad, the Brazilian lingerie model, sued Mick Jagger for child support of \$35,000 a month, the *New York Post* repeated the punning allusion:

The mother of Mick Jagger's love child wants the wrinkly Rolling Stone to paint it green (*New York Post* 10.5.2000, <http://www.mypost.com/f/print/news/item>)

4. Understanding echoic punning allusion

The most influential account of how indirect language works remains that of Grice (1975). Grice regarded the processing of indirect language as involving two steps, firstly a recognition phase and secondly an inferencing phase. Essentially interested in the way conversation functions, Grice (1975) made the point that many conversational utterances are potentially ambiguous and only disambiguated by an agreed code of conversational conduct, which he called the Co-operative Principle (Grice 1975: 45). This maintains that, unless they have good reason to suppose otherwise, listeners will assume that speakers are being co-operative by observing various conversational rules. Grice formulated these as four maxims, adding that there might be other as yet unidentified maxims.

The four maxims Grice (1975) identified are Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner. Listeners assume that speakers will normally provide neither too little nor too much information for their communicative purpose (Quantity), will be truthful and will not make statements for which they have no evidence (Quality), will be relevant (Relation) and will be sufficiently clear (Manner). Unlike the other three maxims, the Maxim of Manner refers not to the content of the utterance but to its form, the manner of expression. Grice specifies four sub-categories of the Maxim of Manner: avoidance of obscurity of expression, avoidance of ambiguity, succinctness and orderliness. These principles enable conversation to be conducted in an economical manner and dispense with the need for speakers to explicitly exclude logical possibilities of interpretation which are not intended by the speaker and not assumed by the listener. In order to cope with the problem of how listeners understand figurative language, Grice introduced the notion of 'conversational implicature', which is determined by context and has to be inferred (Grice 1975: 50).

Grice (1975) did not specifically refer to echoic punning allusion, but among the figures of speech he did refer to are metaphor, hyperbole, litotes and irony. These will tend to be incompatible with one or more Maxims. According to Grice (1975), the Co-operative Principle is so robust that when the hearer perceives discrepancy between the utterance and a maxim, he or she will look for clues which might resolve the discrepancy in terms of non-literal meaning. Grice thus distinguished two sorts of non-observance of a maxim, 'violation' versus 'flouting'. Violation of a maxim involves unostentatiously departing from it, as for instance in lying, which would be a violation of the Maxim of Quality. Flouting a Maxim, on the other hand, involves ostentatiously breaking with it and thereby creating a 'conversational implicature'. Non-literal language will flout rather than violate one or more maxims.

Coombs (1984: 482) argued that echoic allusion may be seen as a two-stage process of conversational implicature, namely allusive reference and allusive implication, if an additional maxim to those of Grice is added, namely a Maxim of Repetition: "Avoid repetition of your own or anyone else's discourse or any features thereof." However, it is probably not necessary to introduce this new maxim since echoic allusion will flout one or more of Grice's original maxims anyway. In particular, apart from flouting the Maxim of Quality (truthfulness), allusive language, like other forms of figurative language, is likely to be stylistically marked (flouting of the Maxim of Manner), and also perhaps apparently unrelated to the topic at hand (flouting of the Maxim of Relation).

Grice (1975: 50) suggested the listener will use the following sources of evidence in working out the implicature:

- (1) the conventional meaning of the words used, together with the identity of any references involved
- (2) the Co-operative Principle and its maxims
- (3) the context, linguistic and non-linguistic, of the utterance
- (4) other items of background knowledge
- (5) the fact (or supposed fact) that all the relevant items falling under the previous headings are available to both participants and both participants know or assume this to be the case.

For punning allusion the basic two stage model may be expanded and adapted as follows into a three stage model, with the third stage optional:

- (1) recognition
 - (a) parallel processing of the alluding language and the source
 - (b) holding of the remembered meaning of the source and the constructed meaning of the alluding language in consciousness
 - (c) experience of productive cognitive dissonance
- (2) inferencing
 - (a) comparison at the micro-level of the form and meaning differences between the alluding language and the source in the manner of metaphor topic and vehicle
 - (b) macro-comparison of the two contexts or scripts
- (3) appreciation of the writer as alluder (optional level of phatic bonding)

The above model departs from Grice's (1975) model in one important respect, namely that at 1a it allows for parallel processing. In fact, since 1975 Grice's contention that figurative meaning is only understood indirectly via literal meaning has come under heavy attack from various quarters. Sperber and Wilson (1995: 231–232) completely rejected the Gricean idea of flouting a maxim and argued that the guiding principle for inferring meaning is what they term 'relevance'. According to them, readers (and listeners) will choose the context for interpretation

which imposes least processing effort. There is empirical evidence to show that idioms, for instance, are accessed directly from the mental lexicon and processing may actually be faster than for their literal paraphrases. Even in altered form well-known idioms are accessed almost as quickly as in canonical form and more quickly than their literal paraphrases (Glucksberg 1993: 11). These findings militate against the idea of figurative meaning being accessed through literal meaning. Indeed, unwanted idiomatic meanings may even intrude in consciousness during processing of idiomatic phrases used literally. This also applies to well-known quotations, which are so closely tied to their source texts in the minds of many language users that it is difficult to use them without evoking the source text.

Nerlich and Clarke (2001: 5) challenged the Gricean assumption that communication is necessarily aimed at reducing the potential ambiguities in words. They argued that activation of apparently irrelevant senses of a word at the referential level has important pragmatic functions in language generally, especially in jocular language where the interpersonal, phatic function is important. They called this 'conspicuous' or 'purposive' ambiguity and would want to counterbalance Grice's Maxim of Manner ("Be perspicuous") by a Maxim of Conspicuity, which would have two sub-maxims: "Make your conversation as interesting / witty / surprising as possible" and "Make your utterance / text as expressive as possible, but still accessible"

In punning echoic allusions a stored holistic meaning of a piece of composed language competes in processing with a meaning arrived at by lexical and syntactic analysis (top-down versus bottom-up processing). Jackendoff (1995) suggested that native speakers of English may have as many as 80,000 fixed expressions stored in memory, including quotations, proverbs, idioms and so forth. In cases where a stored holistic meaning is held in consciousness, rather than losing out to an epistemic meaning before it reaches consciousness, the reader (or listener) will assume in accordance with the Co-operative Principle (Grice 1975), the principle of effort after meaning (Bartlett 1932) and the minimal processing effort and relevance principles (Sperber and Wilson 1995) that the secondary meaning is relevant at the pragmatic and affective levels in the manner of a pun.

The listener will be alerted to the possibility of an intended allusion by experiencing a stumbling block or check in language processing as the meaning of the piece of composed language in its original context intrudes on consciousness alongside a meaning being constructed epistemically (compare Riffaterre 1978: 6). This is the first stage of recognising a conversational implicature. There then follows the inferencing stage. The echoic allusion works first by means of metonymy at the recognition stage as the piece of alluding language triggers a larger text or context of use and then in the manner of a covert metaphor or simile at the interpretation stage as an implicit comparison between the two scripts or texts is perceived. It is a characteristic of allusion, however, that the intertextual reference may be missed by some readers or, even if it is taken, that the implied meaning may not be understood in exactly the same way by all readers.

5. The functions of punning echoic allusions

It is legitimate to ask why writers use echoic punning allusions at all. There are various reasons. As stylistically marked language, echoic punning allusions may function first of all to attract reader attention. In this respect they work according to the foregrounding principle, which depends on ‘linguistic deviation’ (Leech 1969: 37). As an example Ben-Porat (1976) mentioned an advertisement for cheese which used the phrase “the smell which launched a thousand barbecues”. This alludes to “the face that launched a thousand ships” (Christopher Marlowe, *Dr. Faustus*, 1604, Act V, scene 1), where the reference is to Helen of Troy. The effect achieved by replacing ‘face’ with ‘cheese’ and ‘ships’ with ‘barbecues’ is one of grotesque incongruity and nothing more. The allusion functions solely as an attention catcher.

However some allusions may also contribute to the meaning of the text *in praesentia*. For example, “The sound and the fury” (*The Times*, 26.07.1996: 19, headline) is a verbatim quotation from *Macbeth*, which functions firstly to attract the reader’s attention by re-using a familiar Shakespearean phrase. The accompanying article is about the infuriatingly poor quality of the sound track to some films, and the reader who recalls that the phrase occurs in Macbeth’s nihilistic expression of despair, “Life’s but a walking shadow ... a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing” (*Macbeth* Act V, scene v, lines 16–18), will be prompted to reinterpret the semantics of the quotation to suit its new context. The phrase may be seen as elliptical for something like “the fury the cinema-goer experiences when confronted with a poor sound track”. The allusion also contributes affective meaning since the implied comparison with the text *in absentia* is humorously incongruous. This example illustrates the way in which allusions may, on the one hand, ease the cognitive processing load for the reader, because the well-known quotation is quickly recognised, and, on the other hand, present a cognitive challenge for the reader, who has to reinterpret the meaning of the quotation in its new context. In headline allusions, as in ‘the sound and fury’ example, this involves reading on. In other cases it may involve retracing and reflecting.

Recognising and interpreting allusions also involves a measure of aesthetic pleasure (Freud 1905/1960: 148–149). It is important for writers to impart aesthetic pleasure to their readers. This is one way of establishing rapport with the reader. Not only is stylistic embellishment involved (Kellett 1933/1969), but, more importantly, the writer is given the chance to display wit and linguistic ingenuity. In this way common ground can be established with the reader against the background of shared cultural knowledge. Sampson and Smith (1997: 12) stressed that comic effects of incongruity may function to achieve phatic bonding between reader and writer. Humorous allusions may also serve as a vehicle for indirect criticism or ridicule by means of grotesque implicit comparison.

Often multiple functions of a given allusion can be identified, some major and some minor. The weightings of these different functions may vary for different

readers according to how fully they understand the allusion, as is illustrated by the following example:

Soufflé and up she rises (*Daily Express*, 24.2.1996: 38, headline)

This was a headline to an article about baking. It alludes to “Hooray and up she rises”, the chorus line to the sea-shanty ‘What shall we do with the drunken sailor?’ By the use of this allusive headline the writer (1) attracts the reader’s attention, the main function. The reader also experiences (2) the pleasure of recognition and the writer has the chance to (3) display some wit. However, the borrowed stylistic effects of rhythm and inverted word order (4) embellish the text *in praesentia*, the productive ambiguity of the word ‘rise’ (of pastry versus of a ship) is exploited so that (5) physical economy of expression is assured and the implication is that, if you read on, you will learn how to make a successful soufflé (more is meant than is said). At the interpersonal, phatic level, (6) there is a touch of grotesque humour evoked by the juxtaposition of the two contexts. At the processing level, (7) initially comprehension is eased by the recognition of the familiar refrain, but then the reader is (8) cognitively challenged to infer the relevance of the refrain for an article about cooking. This will (9) encourage the reader to read on. From the writer’s perspective the echoic punning allusion functions to (10) establish common ground with the reader (the song is shown to be part of their mutual stored cultural knowledge). Nevertheless, there is also (11) an element of the facetious in “Soufflé and up she rises”. This links the allusion to the genre of corny jokes involving play with hackneyed quotations to raise a groan response. In other cases an allusion may function to (12) debunk a famous quotation from a revered source. Famous quotations from Shakespeare (such as “to be or not to be”) are a frequent source for such ‘groan response’ allusions. This debunking of famous quotations may also be seen as part of the ‘low’ irreverent tradition, which also delights in using language to confuse and confound (Bakhtin 1981: 271).

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have focussed on the form and function of punning echoic allusion. The form is that of cryptic quotation. Typically, a short phrase from a well-known source text is incorporated into the text *in praesentia*, either verbatim or, more usually, deliberately manipulated so as to achieve maximum semantic contrast with the original at the expense of minimal phonological change in the manner of a pun. The distance between the contexts of the source *in absentia* and the unfolding text *in praesentia* makes for strong contrasts in terms of pragmatic meaning at the sentence level. This in turn results in interplay in meaning between the two different meanings in their two different contexts, so that the secondary allusive meaning may be taken as a *sotto voce* gloss or commentary on the primary mean-

ing. In this way, the allusion may contribute to the meaning of the unfolding text in important ways.

However, punning echoic allusions also function at the language processing level and at the socio-affective level. They both ease processing loads for readers (and listeners) by providing familiar language chunks while simultaneously presenting a cognitive challenge to the reader who has to solve the riddle of the allusion. In this way the responsibility for meaning construction is transferred to the reader. The writer, for his or her part, is challenged to so engineer the allusion that the reader will both recognise it and understand it in the way intended. This in turn requires that the writer correctly estimate not only the reader's linguistic, but also his or her cultural knowledge. It is necessary that reader and writer understand each other at each move in the ludic process. In this way allusions also contribute to phatic bonding between reader and writer. In this connection, as a variety of indirect language, they are an important means of bringing humour, but also censure, into texts and of expressing certain attitudes indirectly which it would be inappropriate to express directly.

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