

# ON ALLUSION FROM A SOCIO-COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

CARLA VERGARO  
UNIVERSITY OF PERUGIA

**Abstract** – Although there is no shortage of research on irony or metaphor, there is a scarcity of theoretical work on allusion. In this paper, I focus on allusion and advance a proposal that builds on earlier studies but refines them in the light of current usage-based, complexity-driven models of language. I look at allusion in the framework of the Entrenchment-and-Conventionalization Model (EC-Model hereafter), which is a usage-based and emergentist model of language knowledge and convention rooted in cognitive linguistics that explains the processes underlying the intertwining of social practice and cognition. In accordance with this model, this paper considers allusion as a complex phenomenon that emerges in usage out of the interaction of the intentional activation on the part of the speaker – through linguistic markers of any length – of a network of entrenched associations and conventionalized conformity profiles assumed to be shared with the hearer. I carry out a qualitative analysis of the first inaugural speech pronounced in 1848 by the first president of Liberia, Joseph Jenkins Roberts. This text is exemplary in terms of the complex system of allusions it contains. My aim is to show how the proposal presented in this study helps to unravel this system of allusions, and, in so doing, how it explains the divergent conformity profile of Roberts’ inaugural speech.

**Keywords:** allusion; association; conventionalization; entrenchment; usage.

## 1. Introduction

Although there is no doubt about the significant contribution of previous studies (see §3) to an understanding of allusion, authors do not agree on what allusion is, both as a phenomenon and as a label. Thus, whereas traditionally allusion has been considered a rhetorical device, more recent analyses (see §3) treat it either as a semantic or a pragmatic phenomenon, in the first case focusing on allusion as a referential device, in the second on allusion as a speech act or as an implicature. Moreover, most publications on the topic either focus on allusion in literature (see Machacek 2007) or in philosophy (see Ricks 1992). However, not only is allusion pervasive in ordinary language, but, as pointed out by Bertuccelli (1997, p. 185),

è un fenomeno interessante perché, collocandosi a metà tra il detto e il non detto, individua una zona d’ombra nello studio sugli impliciti del discorso all’interno della quale non è possibile agire né con i soli strumenti semantici, né con i soli strumenti pragmatici”. [[it] is an interesting phenomenon because, being placed between what is said and what is unsaid, it identifies a gray area in the study of implicit phenomena in discourse, within which it is not possible to act with either semantic or pragmatic tools alone. *Translated by author*]

I think that it is possible to overcome this lack of a solid conceptual handle on allusion if one brings together the social and the cognitive dimension of the phenomenon under a unified theoretical model. Therefore, using the lens of the EC-Model (see Schmid 2020 for the latest book-length version), in this paper I propose the following definition of allusion:

Allusion is a complex phenomenon that emerges in usage out of the interaction of the intentional activation on the part of the speaker – using linguistic markers of any length, belonging to any usage event type – of a network of entrenched associations and conventionalized conformity profiles assumed to be shared with the hearer.

I will provide an exemplary analysis and then focus on the allusions contained in the first inaugural speech pronounced by the first president of Liberia, Joseph Jenkins Roberts (Norfolk, Virginia, 1809 - Monrovia, Liberia, 1876), delivered on January 3, 1848.<sup>1</sup> This text was chosen because it is characterised by a complex system of allusions to the Bible. I show how my proposal helps to unravel these biblical allusions, and, in so doing, how it explains the divergent conformity profile of Roberts' inaugural. More precisely, the analysis shows that, although this text belongs to the inaugural speech genre, its conformity profile diverges from that of the US inaugural address – despite the influence that this genre had on Roberts' inaugural speeches (Bank Henriès 1964) –, and converges instead with that of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan sermon.

## 2. The EC-Model

The EC-Model is a usage-based (Barlow, Kemmer 2000; Langacker 2000) and emergentist (Hopper 1987; Bybee, Hopper 2001; Bybee 2006) model that explains how linguistic knowledge emerges out of usage events. Indeed, in this model, usage plays a pivotal role that explains the processes underlying the intertwining of social practice and cognition. More precisely, the model explains how these two dimensions, captured by the terms *conventionalization* and *entrenchment*, interact in usage events and how, in turn, they are conducive to repeated usage. Thus, a distinction is made between these two dimensions of linguistic knowledge. Entrenchment refers to the cognitive process through which individual communicative knowledge is adapted and reorganized under the pressure of social exigencies. It is a process operating over various types of associations. Conventionalization refers to the social processes that guide to the convergence of the regularities of behavior of community members around specific utterance types. These will show a degree of conventionalization at the micro-linguistic level of words, sentences and single speech acts, at the meso-linguistic level of combination of speech acts, and at the macro-linguistic level of combination of moves.

More precisely, usage consists of different types of activities that contribute to utterance production and comprehension: motor (articulation, writing), sensory (utterance and situation perception), cognitive (activation of associations), and social (co-semiosis, co-adaptation). All the facets of a usage event have the potential to become entrenched and conventionalized. Consequently, utterance types can be regarded as condensed records of their usage history (Schmid 2020, p. 16).

Entrenchment consists of a network of associations that represent individual linguistic knowledge. Schmid (2020, p. 43), following Langacker (2000, p. 94), defines associations in broad terms as “the ability ‘of one kind of experience... to evoke another’”. A central claim of the EC-Model is that linguistic knowledge is stored and becomes available for processing in the form of more or less strongly entrenched associations. Speakers do not entrench utterance types. They entrench the patterns of associations that become active while they process utterances. This associative network consists of four types of associations: symbolic, syntagmatic, paradigmatic and pragmatic. Symbolic associations link form and meaning of a sign: for example, the encoding of an

<sup>1</sup> The text of the speech was published in the *African Repository*, XXIV, 1848, pp. 120-126. For Roberts' inaugural addresses, see Guannu J.S. (ed.) 1980, *The inaugural addresses of the Presidents of Liberia: From Joseph Jenkins Roberts to William R. Tolbert Jr., 1848 to 1976*, Exposition Press, New York.

illocutionary force (*Could you do x?* as a directive speech act). Syntagmatic associations are the result of the repeated sequential processing of linguistic forms and meanings: for example, the recurrent syntagmatic association between speech acts of blessing and cursing in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan sermon of New England communities<sup>2</sup> in the *if-then* form (*if we do x, then the Lord will delight to dwell among us as his own people; but if we don't, He will surely brake out in wrath against us*). Paradigmatic associations activate competing alternatives: for example, in the above-mentioned Puritan sermon, the occurrence of the speech act of cursing after blessing is the result of a competition, at the paradigmatic level, of alternative choices among various speech acts that could occur after blessing. Pragmatic associations connect all the previous ones because they encompass all the socio-pragmatic information that triggers the other types of associations. They serve to form probabilistic predictions that will be either confirmed or rejected. For example, it is expected that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century New England Puritan sermon the sequence blessing-cursing will be found because of the influence of the Bible, Deuteronomy in particular (Vergaro 2022).

Conventionalization refers to the tacit agreement members of a community share on how to solve a task. The recurrent activities at the heart of conventionalization are co-semiosis, which is triggered by intentionality and cooperation, and co-adaptation, which includes priming or alignment that takes place during the interaction between the members of a community. From the cognitive point of view, the actual performance of these recurrent activities translates into the strengthening and routinization of associations that lead to a more distributed entrenchment, i.e., utilization and diffusion of the utterance type in a schematized form that is shared by the members of a specific community. As such, it will have a specific conformity profile consisting of different dimensions. The first being onomasiological conformity, which refers to the choice of a specific form at the micro-, meso- and macro-linguistic level to achieve a communicative goal (for example, the sermon was the genre in which the truth of the Word was most embodied for the Puritan communities of New England). The second being semasiological conformity, which is concerned with the meaning and functions attributed to a form (the spreading of the truth of the Word). The third dimension being syntagmatic conformity, that is, having to do with the probabilistic combination of forms into patterns (for example, at the macro-linguistic level, the sequence Doctrine-Reasons-Applications). And the last dimension being contextual conformity, which refers to the occurrence of forms or linguistic patterns in a specific context (17<sup>th</sup> century New England, type of religious communication, role of the preacher).

To understand how the proposed approach enriches our understanding of allusion, in the following paragraph, I provide a selective overview of the way allusion has been investigated so far.

### 3. Allusion as a semantic and/or pragmatic phenomenon

In Perri's seminal study, allusion is both "the marker in the alluding text, the sign that points to a referent by echoing it in some way" (1978, p. 290), and "a manner of signifying which includes both the unique extension and precise aspect(s) of its referents' intension – without overtly mentioning this aspect(s)" (Perri 1978, p. 293). From the semantic point of

<sup>2</sup> In the case of the Puritan sermon these pragmatic associations are also triggered by other contextual forces that is not relevant to mention within the scope of this paper. See Vergaro (2022).

view, allusion denotes a source text and selects specific attributes of its intensional meaning. According to Perri, once these attributes are evoked, they activate “larger inter and intra-textual patterns of properties with consequent further modification of the alluding text” (1978, p. 295). Perri’s semantic characterization of allusion, however, does not explain how echoing works, what lies behind a marker’s possibility to evoke something else, and why certain attributes are selected and become salient, and others do not. The same problem emerges in the treatment of allusion as a speech act. In the list of felicity conditions underlying the production and comprehension of the speech act of alluding, the author repeatedly uses the word ‘echo’ (verb and noun) but no explanation is given on what makes echoing possible.

Coombs (1984) employs the standard, two-stage pragmatic model – in particular, Grice’s theory of Implicature (Grice 1975) –, and claims that allusion is the product of a process consisting of two steps: an allusive reference – the implication that one is referring to something –, and an allusive implication – the implication that some additional proposition must be added –. The referential element is thus fundamental to have an allusion, but such a reference is implicational, i.e., the speaker does not refer to an entity (E) in what s/he says and, furthermore, does not commit her/himself to having referred to E (Grice 1975, p. 478). However, an allusion must be understood to be a felicitous speech act. It is logically impossible for a speaker to simply be implicating (through allusion) that s/he is referring to E without implicating some proposition thereby, and this means that “Allusive Reference brings about Allusive Implication” (Grice 1975, p. 481). Consistently with the model used, Coombs posits a primacy of allusive reference by means of which the speaker implicates something else. However, it is not clear what makes this process possible, and although the contextual dimension obviously plays a role, it is not spelled out how this dimension triggers the two sub-processes mentioned. Moreover, Coombs focuses on the process and does not mention anything about the form that an allusion can take (a word, a phrase, a sentence, all of them?). It is relevant to state that not all indirect meanings have the same degree of indirectness – some allusions become endemic in a given lingua-cultural system and so, recurrent and stable –. Thus, an explanation as to how specific words, phrases or sentences, in acts of co-semiosis, can allude to something else is needed.

Bertuccelli (1997) keeps the distinction between referential and literary allusion and spells it out in terms of the tools used by each of them. Accordingly, whereas literary allusion uses mainly calque and contextual shift, referential allusion uses mainly indefiniteness, semantic underdetermination, generalization, and ellipsis (Bertuccelli 1997, p. 191). Therefore, literary allusion needs a textual complicity not required in the case of referential allusion. The definition Bertuccelli gives of referential allusion is very similar to that given by Perri (1978), but she adds to it the necessity of speaker’s intention and attribution of responsibility to the hearer: to have an allusion it is necessary that the speaker have the intention to allude and, in so doing, to attribute to the listener the responsibility to recognize such an intention and to retrieve from her encyclopedic knowledge the meaning alluded to. Moreover, allusion is defined in terms of the semantic space to which allusion belongs (Perri 1978, p. 199), and hence, in relation to insinuation, citation, reticence and metaphor.

In her analysis, allusion emerges as a means that can be used to realize an insinuation, an act of reticence, or a metaphor. According to Bertuccelli (1997), Relevance Theory can be useful to understand how an allusion works. In the end, the process has to do with the individual search for meaning that produces the maximum cognitive effect with the minimum computational effort (Bertuccelli 1997, p. 202). Thus, the process requires that the speaker give the hearer the necessary information to activate a frame-like

type of knowledge, which allows the hearer to identify what is communicated beyond what is said. As for Bertuccelli's proposal, I do not think that the distinction between literary and referential allusion is of help in understanding what allusion is and how it works in usage events, and literature is a case of language usage.

Irwin (2001) uses the term 'association' – though in a non-technical way – to define and explain what an allusion is. Therefore, in my view, it contains a useful intuition that, however, the author does not develop further. "Allusion is a reference that is indirect in the sense that it calls for associations that go beyond the mere substitution of a referent. [...] Allusions are typically but not necessarily brief and may or may not be literary in nature" (Irwin 2001, p. 289). The definition brings in internalist and intentionalist views of allusion and represents a synthesis that contains aspects of both of them. Thus, an allusion is a specific type of reference, i.e., one that indirectly refers to something. 'Indirect' is here understood as it is in the standard pragmatic model, i.e., something that is not directly said, although it is suggested or hinted at using words and structures that can in principle be recognized as alluding. Meaning comprehension is a two-step process that should necessarily start from the decoding of the literal meaning and then move on to the non-literal one. However, similarities among two texts are not a sufficient condition to have an allusion (internalist view). An allusion must be 'intended', i.e., the speaker must intend to communicate something beyond what is said, otherwise we would have unintentional echoes (see also Perri 1978), not allusions (intentionalist view). Certain associations are to be made aimed at picking up the intended intensional attributes of the referent if the allusion is to be correctly understood (see also Perri 1978). In Irwin, the contextual clues that the listener seems to use to make the correct associations are the type of text – 'text' used in the broad sense of any piece of verbal action – and the author of the text itself. So, every allusion is situation-bound. Lastly, very interestingly, the author rejects the generally accepted idea that an allusion is characterized by brevity: "allusions are typically brief but must not necessarily be" (Irwin 2001, p. 288). Indeed, it is possible that a whole text alludes to another text, not necessarily belonging to the same type of genre.

As I said previously, although Irwin (2001) introduces the issue of associations, it is difficult to understand what type of associations he is talking about and how they work. The only characterization of the associations that are necessary to correctly comprehend an allusion is "unstated, additional" (Irwin 2001, p. 288), which does not tell us much about the nature of these associations.

Chamizo Domínguez (2021) is the most recent publication on allusion. Allusion is analyzed as a cognitive mechanism and compared with similar mechanisms such as quotation, plagiarism, and echo. What seems to distinguish these mechanisms is the issue of intention that regulate the relationship between speaker and hearer. Only in the case of allusion, however, does the speaker have an intention that the hearer recognize referential opacity and engage in a process of meaning attribution. No referential opacity is to be found in quotations, where the convention of attribution of source – precise wording, use of inverted commas, source – must be respected. No appropriation of source is present in allusion, but it is in plagiarism, and the reader is expected to be unable to detect this. Lastly, echo seems to be referred to whatever comes to our minds of past readings when we read a text. If intention is the hallmark of allusion, then, according to Chamizo Dominguez, allusion can be analyzed as a case of implicature (Grice 1975). Like implicature, (i) the working out of an allusion is possible only if one assumes that the Gricean cooperative principle is in place; (ii) allusion can be analyzed as the result of the violation of maxims (Quantity and Mode); and (iii) allusion is cancellable and does not depend on the conventional meaning of words.

The paper focuses on the cognitive function that allusion has, which makes it possible to define it as “figura de pensamiento” (Chamizo Domínguez 2021, p. 88) though, in the end, this function is grounded in shared contextual assumptions between speaker and hearer. This is without doubt a step forward in the direction of a more cognitively oriented characterization of allusion. Yet ultimately it is not sufficient to understand how allusion works.

In the following section, I add to these previous approaches by looking at allusion in the framework of the EC-Model.

## 4. Allusion in the EC-Model

### 4.1. Exemplary analysis

Allusion can be explained as the result of the complex interaction of entrenchment and conventionalization in usage events. As explained earlier, four types of associations – symbolic, paradigmatic, syntagmatic and pragmatic – are responsible for the production and comprehension of the form and meaning of an utterance type. In this perspective, any intended allusion – literary or not – will be more or less felicitous depending on the activation of specific networks of associations. If semiosis is to be co-semiosis, then interactants must constantly make assumptions and probabilistic predictions about what is entrenched at the individual level and what is conventionalized at the societal level. Of course, in the case of any indirect or implicit meaning, there is no guarantee of success. According to the EC-model, in front of the task of encoding or understanding any utterance type, our associative network:

will home in on an entrenched pattern serving as an *attractor*, i.e., a state that it reaches fairly quickly and effortlessly because it has frequently been activated before. [...] if the network is confronted with [...] a new word or an unfamiliar expression, it will try to process it with the help of available patterns of associations. [...] Innovations can be generated by the associative network [...] by recruiting associative representations of existing words or variable patterns. (Schmid 2020, p. 45)

The model is also useful in explaining cases of misfire. In this case, a network of associations different from the one the speaker intended to activate – under the assumption that they are shared with the hearer – comes to the fore. Entrenchment is individual and, although in the EC-Model it is said that entrenchment and conventionalization feed and are fed by each other and feed and are fed by usage, there is still room for individual variation.

The following example works as an introductory illustration of the explanatory potential of the EC-Model:

#### 1. Crown and dirty

‘Crown and dirty’, used during a talk show in a conservative, royalist British TV network debating the involvement of Prince Harry and his wife Meghan with Omid Scobie’s revelations of racist royals in the Dutch translation of the book *Endgame*, activates the complex unit ‘down and dirty’. This is possible because of the specific pragmatic associations that are shared during the process of co-semiosis. As an adjective, the OED (<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5197556613>) reports three properties for ‘down and dirty’: 1. Unprincipled, devious, viciously competitive; employing ruthless or aggressive tactics.

2. sexually explicit or provocative; raunchy. 3. Lacking finesse, refinement, or polish; direct and explicit; gritty, earthy. In its adverbial meaning ‘down and dirty’ refers to something done “in a devious or surreptitious manner”.

The syntagmatic association between *down* and *dirty* in the expression ‘down and dirty’ is strong. This expression occurs in song (*Down and dirty live, Danger Danger* 1990), movie (*Down ‘n dirty*, directed by F. Williamson, 2000) and book (*Down and dirty*, Wild Cards anthology, 1988) titles. The attributes of the meaning that are selected each time depend on the pragmatic associations. Thus, in example (1), the attributes that are salient are those referred to something that is done in a surreptitious and, at the same time, unprincipled and vicious way. This is based on the pragmatic associations that are activated in the usage event of the talk show, i.e., the particulars of the rift between Prince Harry and his wife and the royal family, as well as the relationship between them and Omid Scobie – generally considered to be their mouthpiece, allowing them to insinuate without assuming upon themselves the responsibility of what is said.

Then, zooming in on the word ‘crown’ – which occupies the slot that in ‘down and dirty’ belongs to ‘down’ –, from the onomasiological point of view, one of the attributes that the word connotes is “sovereignty, authority, or dominion of which a royal crown is the symbol” (OED, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4040630400>). From the semasiological point of view, the members of the class that the word denotes could be all the existing royal families. However, after the worldwide success of the Netflix series ‘The Crown’, in this context, ‘crown’ activates pragmatic associations about the British royal family. Indeed, some words start to acquire specific meanings if encountered in contexts that trigger those meanings. As Schmid states “pragmatic associations are strengthened to such an extent that they become registered and routinized as symbolic associations” (2020, p. 281). Thus, in the light of these pragmatic associations, when processing the sequence ‘crown and dirty’, we detect a semantic anomaly at the level of the syntagmatic conformity profile of the expression due to the substitution of ‘crown’ with ‘down’. The anomaly is sorted out through the cooperation of the syntagmatic association ‘down and dirty’ with the symbolic association between form and meaning of the words in the construct. Here the phonetic difference between ‘crown’ and ‘down’ amounts to the initial consonant/consonant cluster of the two words, [‘kraʊn] vs [‘daʊn]. These similar symbolic associations shared as part of the knowledge of the English language are exploited in the process of semantic adjustment to activate the syntagmatic association ‘down and dirty’. It is from the complex and nonlinear interaction of this network of associations, at the level of entrenchment, and conformity profiles, at the level of conventionalization, that the (probable) intended meaning emerges, i.e., the accusations of racism in the book are made by Prince Harry and his wife in a surreptitious and devious way. Moreover, this way of behaving is to be condemned, not praised, and makes the accusation itself not credible.

In the following paragraph, I apply the model to examples of allusion taken from the first inaugural speech pronounced by the first president of Liberia, Joseph Jenkins Roberts.

## 4.2. Allusion in Joseph J. Roberts' inaugural speech

In this section, I apply the EC-Model to the analysis of allusions to the Bible and the Puritan sermon of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Roberts' first inaugural speech,<sup>3</sup> delivered on January 3, 1848. The analysis illustrates why this text conformity profile appears to be different from the conformity profile of the American inaugural speech, even if it is well known that Washington's first inaugural, which is considered a model for subsequent inaugurals, was itself modelled on the Puritan sermon (see Jamieson 1973). The two genres – the Puritan sermon and the American inaugural address – are both highly ritualized.

The Puritan sermon of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was very well disciplined, as exemplified by William Perkin's *Arte of Prophesying*. What became entrenched at the individual level and conventionalized at the societal level was a genre having the force of a directive-commissive speech act (Bach, Harnish 1979), i.e. an act that serves as well to commit the speaker and to attempt to commit the hearer to reciprocal future actions, thus showing the features of both a directive and a commissive speech act (Searle 1976). From the point of view of the conformity profile, it consists of the association of three sections: Doctrine, Reasons, Application. Within each of them, specific syntagmatic associations consisting of the combination of various illocutionary types become entrenched and the corresponding syntagmatic conformity profile conventionalized. For example, in the third section, the application and the exhortation to action are realized through a prevalence of the directive illocutionary type.

As for the inaugural speech genre, considering that Roberts' inaugural is in Liberia but strongly influenced by the US inaugural, I refer to Campbell and Jamieson (2008)'s seminal work on this genre. As they propose, firstly a process of unification of the addressees takes place through their reconceptualization as *people* in the inaugural discourse, whereby the people construal is modified according to the occasion. The next move is to reaffirm the shared values of a nation and the commitment to pass them on intact to subsequent generations. These two moves are followed by the enunciation of the political philosophy underpinning the new administration, which, consistent with the epideictic nature of the inaugural speech, has only a contemplative purpose, and does not function as a call to action. Lastly, the investiture rite requires the president to demonstrate that he is aware both of what the executive power requires and allows him to do, and of the limits imposed by the Constitution. As part of the recognition of the limits of the president's executive power, in the final part of the inaugural address, the nation and the president himself are placed in the hands of God.

Regarding the context of the speech, it is not possible within the scope of this paper to delve into the complex history of mulattos and free blacks' migration to West Africa, the foundation of Liberia and the role that the American Colonization Society (hereafter ACS) – the white-based, benevolent society founded in 1816 by the Reverend Robert Finley – played in the process.<sup>4</sup> What is relevant here for my argumentation is that, in the peculiar rhetoric (Stillion Southard 2019) of the ACS, whose members advocated the foundation of a colony on the shore of Africa to find a solution to chattel slavery via the solution of the “race” question, the African colonization enterprise was narrated in religious terms. Thanks to God's Providence, the colony would become “a glorious

<sup>3</sup> The pages cited in this analysis refer to Guannu J.S. (ed.) 1980, *The inaugural addresses of the Presidents of Liberia: From Joseph Jenkins Roberts to William R. Tolbert Jr., 1848 to 1976*, Exposition Press, New York.

<sup>4</sup> Some of the most recent publications on the topic are Kahrl (2009), Everill (2012), Spooner (2014), Stillion Southard (2019).



beacon, beaming with broad, and vivid, and constant splendor, indefinitely into the interior of an extensive continent overspread with the darkness of heathenism”, thus representing for African natives “a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid [...] a renewal on the African shores of the splendid drama acted [in New England] two centuries before” (ACS 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, 1825, pp. 13-14). This narration was absorbed and reworked by the free blacks and mulattos who were displaced in Africa during the foundation years of the colony and later became the pillar of the Liberian nationalism.

Indeed, faced with the impossibility to truly choose their own future, the free blacks and mulattos who left America for Africa in the 1820s and became the Americo-Liberian elite and the founding fathers of the Liberian Republic, transformed the rhetoric of the ACS into a diasporic rhetoric in which the identity of blacks in Liberia was modeled on the biblical Exodus, the text that establishes the relationship between God and Israel understood as a people, first through the liberation from slavery in Egypt, and then through the covenant that also includes the conquest of Canaan, which was proof that the colonization of other lands was the result of God’s will as part of the covenant with his people. So, the narrative of the Exodus, which had been so important to America’s early colonizers becomes an archetype for African Americans who left America for Liberia as well (see Marbury 2015).

Joseph Jenkins Roberts migrated to Liberia with his family in 1829. A freeborn mulatto, he was a very religious man. Before leaving America for Liberia, he had joined the Methodist Church, converting, and serving as a preacher and class leader. The cornerstones of Methodism – the individual’s methodical and steadfast commitment to the attainment of holiness, deep knowledge and absolute faith in the Scriptures, missionary zeal, and work ethic – informed Roberts’ entire life. Lastly, he was a self-taught man, very well learned – especially in the domain of Law – and was recognized and described as such by his contemporaries (Bank Henries 1964; Tyler-McGraw 2007). The Republic, of which Roberts had been a major supporter and of which he became the first president, was a divided nation. Indeed, the resolution that, in October 1846, led to its proclamation was based on a very slim majority vote. Moreover, especially in the United States, the significance of the Liberian experiment was debated, and never before had been the comparison with the European colonization of America so recurring (Mills 2014; Tyler-McGraw 2007). So, the founding of the nation and its success became the way to demonstrate the black people’s capacity for self-determination.

Right from the beginning of Roberts’ speech, there are highly specific pragmatic associations connected to specific linguistic forms. After having announced his entering into office and having articulated the sentiments of the occasion, before he moves on to the conceptualization of the people<sup>5</sup> and to the enunciation of shared history and values, the first allusion to the Bible is found in the following excerpt:

2. I therefore deeply deplore my want of talents and feel my mind filled with anxiety and uneasiness, to find myself so unequal to the duties of the important station to which I am called. (p. 1)

The word *talents* in “my want of talents”, is an allusion to the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25, pp. 14-30). The symbolic association between form and meaning that is activated because of the above-mentioned pragmatic associations is that of any ability of “mind or

<sup>5</sup> Roberts’ audience was represented by the men of the legislature, who were religious, educated and entrepreneurial free blacks and mulattos, most of them, like him, from Virginia, who ended up being the mercantile élite of Monrovia (see Bank Henries 1964; Tyler-McGraw 2007).

body viewed as something divinely entrusted to a person for use and empowerment” (OED, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6229213018>). A few lines before Roberts has defined the proclamation of the Republic “a momentous period in the history of Liberia” (p. 1), and he is now humbling himself – as is expected in the tradition of American inaugural speeches – and asking for the help of his fellow citizens to honor the great commission this New Israel has accepted. As Bainbridge states, the Parable of the Talents “is premised on the legal backstory about the fiduciary duties of servants”, in a fiduciary law system founded on “broad notions of justice and morality” (2016, p. 2), those who have fiduciary duties are construed as agents. As the servants in the Parable are the fiduciaries of the master, so are American Liberians. As the servants in the Parable, they have decided to take risks because of the obligations they have towards God. As the master in the parable has trusted his servants and thus made himself vulnerable, so has God with this people. Indeed, “it is precisely this combination of trust and vulnerability that is characteristic of fiduciary relationships” (Bainbridge 2016, p. 8), and this vulnerability resonates throughout the whole text.

So, through the allusion to talents, Roberts is conceptualizing American Liberians as people having an identity that includes agentivity and, consequently, the ability of assuming responsibility for the republic “established by their voluntary consent and appointed by their own free choice” (p. 2). The onomasiological process of mapping the concepts “New Israel” or “people having agentivity” into the linguistic expression *Liberians* is a process of symbolization made possible by the previously explained pragmatic associations. However, whether the same linguistic expression in the future would trigger the same symbolic association – and, from the semasiological point of view, map the same concepts – is exactly the main challenge that this newly born nation must face.

In a speech delivered in 1851, Roberts explains that the mission of Liberians as a chosen people is that “of restoring to Africa a government, a name and the blessings of civilization and Christianity” (Bank Henries 1964, p. 64). In the light of this, their suffering and struggle are experiences that a chosen people must necessarily have since they are proof of a divine plan, of which God himself is the ultimate judge. Their struggle in an inhospitable country represents their “hour of important trial”.

3. Other eras, I know, have been marked by dangers and difficulties which “tried men’s souls”. [...] in the hour of important trial. (p. 2)

However, in the context of Roberts’ speech, the symbolic association between the form and the meaning of the word *trial* – supported by “tried men’s souls” in the immediate context – is intended not only to allude to the religious trial of the Bible (see, for example, the “fiery trial” in 1 Pet 4:12), but also to the trial they are put through as a race that must prove to the world to be capable of self-determination.

The following example shows how the construal of this chosen people takes place through the complex interaction of allusions activated by pragmatic, symbolic and syntagmatic associations.

4. [...] that little band of patriots – the pioneers in this noble enterprise – in the hour of important trial. At a time when they were almost without arms, ammunition, discipline, or government – a mere handful of insulated Christian pilgrims, in pursuit of civil and religious liberty, surrounded by savage and warlike tribes bent upon their ruin and total annihilation – with “a staff and a sling” only, as it were, they determined, in the name of the “Lord of Hosts” to stand their ground and defend themselves to the last extremity against their powerful adversary. (p. 2)

American Liberian colonizers are construed as “pioneers”. Under the pragmatic associations previously discussed, the word activates a specific representation: that of the Puritans who colonized the New World. This process of symbolization is supported co-textually by the contemporary activation of the compatible representations of “isolated Christian pilgrims, in pursuit of civil and religious liberty” and “these first adventurers”. The allusion to the Puritan colonization of America thus emerges out of the activation of this network of representations.

Furthermore, the magnitude of their enterprise is made clear through the allusion to the biblical episode of David and Goliath. This episode is not mentioned directly but referred to through Old Testament allusions to Samuel (1, 17:40, and 2, 5:10).<sup>6</sup> The first (with “a staff and a sling”) is a syntagmatic association that activates knowledge of verse 40 of Samuel 1:17 “And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd’s bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine”; the second syntagmatic association (“Lord of Hosts”), from 2 Samuel 5:10, alludes to David’s Conquest of Jerusalem, and of God’s presence in David’s victories and in the establishment and affirmation of Israel’s monarchy (“And David went on and grew great and the Lord God of Hosts was with him”), which gave compactness to God’s people.

If the beginning of Roberts’ inaugural corresponds, from the point of view of the conformity profile, to the analysis of the inaugural speeches by Campbell and Jamieson (2008) in the use of the moves ‘Conceptualization of the people’ and ‘Appeal to shared history’, it is also true that, within these moves, Roberts amplifies the allusions to the Bible generating, at the micro-linguistic level, a clear onomasiological variation.

The Bible transpires in the excerpts that follows, taken from the move corresponding to Campbell and Jamieson’s (2008) ‘Enacting the presidential role’. This is the section in which Roberts’ role as president of the newly formed Republic of Liberia emerges clearly. In this role, he appropriates history and emphasizes its significance in light of God’s plan for his chosen people. Two allusions are found in (5). The first is activated by the phrase “house of bondage”. The mechanism that is at work here, as in the previous examples, is one in which, when specific pragmatic associations are in place, the association of the component parts of this sequence loses strength in the minds of speakers, while the syntagmatic association between the two components and its use as a whole chunk to express a specific meaning becomes more dominant. So, Roberts is equating Americo-Liberians to the people of Israel and alluding to the Israelites’ captivity in Egypt through the expression “house of bondage” that recurs in several books of the Old Testament (Exodus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Micah). Through the second allusion – the Promised Land –, he says that Gods’ telic action did not dispose of their deliverance to that “land of liberty and promise” (Heb. 11: 9) through dangers of all kinds to let them perish.

5. Nor there is any reason to apprehend that the Divine Disposer of human events, after having separated us from the house of bondage, and led us safely through so many dangers towards the land of liberty and promise, will leave the work of our political redemption, and consequent happiness unfinished. (p. 7)

<sup>6</sup> The use of inverted commas does not indicate a quotation since a quotation, to be such, should report the precise wording and the source. Instead, it is to be understood following Bertuccelli (2022) as a mark indicating a point in the text where cognitive processes are set in motion to enable the appropriate interpretation of the text.

Indeed, in

6. Wilderness of difficulties (p. 7)

“wilderness” alludes to a vast, inhospitable land, full of dangers, which, nonetheless, they must explore and conquer to attend the errand on which they were sent.

However, it is the final part of the speech that shows how allusion does not necessarily work at the level of words or combination of words, but also involves the macro-linguistic level of texts. And it is in this final part of Roberts’ inaugural that the influence of the Puritan sermon conformity profile is more marked. As already said, in this section of the prototypical American inaugural speech, one finds the president’s call to action to his fellow-citizens. However, Roberts inserts the exhortation to act according to God’s Law using blessings and curses into the text, which is typical especially of the ‘Application’ section of the Puritan sermon. It is well known that the covenant theology was central to Puritan religious thought. Being a covenanted community entailed taking up commissions and respecting a host of obligations. At the same time, the covenant with God stimulated fear that failing to live up to them would bring down God’s wrath. This ancipital tension was skillfully exploited by Puritan ministries and is similarly exploited by Roberts. The sequence of examples reported in (7) illustrates this.

7. But  
if
- (a) there be any among us dead to all sense of honor and love of their country [...];
  - (b) deaf to the calls of liberty [...];
  - (c) forgetful of the benevolence [...];
  - (d) neither the examples nor the success of other nations [...] have effect upon them; neither the injuries they received in the land whence they came [...] can move them;  
then
  - (e) Let them be assured that they deserve to be slaves. [...]
  - (f) Let them banish from their minds the hope of obtaining that freedom [...].
  - (g) Let them forget every duty [...].
  - (h) Let them return into slavery, hug their chains and be a reproach and a by-word among all nations. (p. 8)

After having described how the Divine Providence will continue to bless all their efforts, he describes the sanctions that await those who do not live up to God’s expectations through a sequence of curses introduced by the adversative conjunction *but*. Blessings and curses are found in various covenantal texts in the Bible (e.g. Exodus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Matthew, a.o.). Nonetheless, the locus classicus of blessings and curses relating to covenant obligation is Deuteronomy 27, and the expansion of blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28, which is characterized by a preponderance of curses threatened for acts of disobedience to God’s law (Deut. 15-68). As for the grammatical form in the Bible, when used asthetic acts, blessings and curses appear in the form *cursed/blessed be + 3<sup>rd</sup> PERS. PRO.*, which conceals the agent, so that they exclusively rest on the power of the spoken words, which tend to be fixed and unalterable. In the non-thetic use, *if* (protasis)-*then* (apodosis) constructions are used, they are future-oriented and represent prospective actions. The *if-then* syntagmatic association in the grammar of curses and blessings activates specific dynamics that establish a narrative tension in the text.

Roberts lists the curses that will befall those who fail to fulfill their obligations under the covenant these people have made with God. He inserts a tight sequence of five protases introduced by *if*, followed by an equally tight sequence of apodoses introduced by *then*, which culminate in “let them be a reproach and a by-word among all nations” (p. 8).

The whole section alludes to Deuteronomy not only at the level of the syntagmatic association of words (e.g., “a by-word among all nations” Deut. 28-37), but also at the structural level. Moreover, the same structural organization is recurrent in the ‘Application’ section of the Puritan sermon, in which not only ideas but also structures were drawn from parts of the Bible. Consequently, the *if-then* sequences in the expression of curses is something that was expected to be entrenched at the individual level and conventionalized at the societal level in an audience like the one Roberts was addressing. The frequency of exposure to biblical texts makes activation of representations – syntactic encoding of curses as non-thetic acts – easy and predictable, in terms of audience recognition of communicative intention. The process relies on the routinization of syntagmatic associations, supported by pragmatic associations, i.e., situation bound recurrence of same syntactic forms. Therefore, this whole part of the inaugural alludes to the deontic dimension of the commitment that this people, as a chosen people, must meet, and does so not only at the level of words and their syntagmatic combination, but at the macro-level of text structure.

## 5. Conclusion

Employing Schmid’s (2020) EC-Model, in this paper I have analyzed allusion as a complex phenomenon that emerges in usage out of the interaction of the intentional activation on the part of the speaker – through linguistic markers of any length, belonging to any usage event type – of a network of entrenched associations and conventionalized conformity profiles assumed to be shared with the hearer. The EC-Model

puts almost all the explanatory burden on the activation of patterns of more or less strongly entrenched symbolic, syntagmatic, paradigmatic, and pragmatic associations. This activation is coordinated by working memory, whose task is to construct an appropriate conceptualization from all the available syntactic, lexical, semantic, and pragmatic information. (Schmid 2020, p. 64)

To illustrate its heuristic value in the analysis of allusion, I have carried out an exemplary analysis first and then I have focused on allusions in J.J. Roberts’ first inaugural speech. The text belongs to the inaugural address genre and, therefore, it shares with the texts belonging to this genre a prototypical conformity profile. However, because of the presence of a complex system of biblical allusions, it diverges from the prototypical inaugural speech genre, showing – more prominently in the last part – a conformity profile that converges instead with that of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan sermon.

The analysis shows that the model can explain allusion at every level of linguistic analysis, not just the micro-linguistic level of words, but also at the meso-linguistic level of combination of speech acts, and the macro-linguistic level of text. Therefore, it provides evidence that allusion does not necessarily have to be brief – word- or phrase-based – neither does it need to work within the boundaries of a single sentence. Of course, the possible extent to which one can allude without a communicative failure depends on the degree of strength of the various associations activated.

This study has the following implications. From the theoretical and methodological point of view, it proposes an approach of integrating social and cognitive perspectives in understanding allusion. Placing all the burden on various types of associations, allusion is explained without making a distinction between literary and non-literary allusion and claiming that brevity cannot be considered the hallmark of allusion. In so doing, the

proposal has the potential to be applied in investigating allusion in all its forms and at all levels of analysis.

**Bionote:** Carla Vergaro holds an associate professor position in English Linguistics, certified for full professorship position, at the University of Perugia, Italy. Her main research interests lie in pragmatic linguistics, cognitive semantics, text and discourse analysis, and contrastive linguistics. Her articles have been published in international journals such as *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Pragmatics & Cognition*, *Applied Linguistics* (co-authored), *Language and Cognition* (co-authored), *Discourse and Society* (co-authored), *Discourse Studies*, *English Studies*, *Text and Talk*, *English for Specific Purposes*, *Linguistics and Education*, and *Language and Literature*. Her monographs include *Il genere business letter in italiano e inglese* and *Illocutionary shell nouns in English*.

**Author's address:** [carla.vergaro@unipg.it](mailto:carla.vergaro@unipg.it)

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