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Making (and Un-making) Meaning in Alejandro Zambra's *Multiple Choice*

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ABSTRACT

Alejandro Zambra's *Multiple Choice* is comprised entirely of multiple choice questions. Readers report deriving rich inferences from the text because of, rather than despite, the metafictional form, observing how Zambra strategically foregrounds the processes involved in inferring and deciding upon meaning, and ably incorporating this foregrounding into their interpretations. Zambra's text directly and deeply engages with fundamental pragmatic interpretative principles and processes – the same pragmatic interpretative principles and processes which relevance theory attempts to account for and explicate. This article therefore uses relevance theory to analyse the inferential processes encouraged by the systems of meaning-making established (and sometimes also pointedly and poignantly collapsed) within each of the text's distinct sections, the resultant available inferences, and how those inferences can be coherently integrated and developed into broader thematic interpretations. Additionally, this article discusses the significance of second-person address and disnarration to those pragmatic processes which Zambra meaningfully foregrounds, exploits and subverts.

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Relevance theory; metafiction; second-person address; disnarration

The Multiple Choices of *Multiple Choice* and the Relevance of Relevance Theory

Alejandro Zambra's book *Multiple Choice* is a work of fiction in the form of a multiple choice test.[1] Specifically, it is in the form of the multiple choice Academic Aptitude Test that was used in Chile from 1967 to 2003 as the main basis upon which students were selected for university education, a version of which is still used today. Novey, reviewing the book for *The New York Times*, writes

> Just last week, my 16-year-old niece in Chile took a multiple-choice test in her literature class that asked her and her classmates to identify "the correct order" of events in a Borges story. I shudder to think what Borges would make of such a question, which is really about testing a student's ability to recognize, and comply with, the intentions of the test maker.[2]

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[1]Zambra.
[2]Novey.

Multiple Choice is designed to ask the reader what they make of such a question, about what intentions lie behind such questions, and what compliance or non-compliance can mean. Zambra's work is often associated with the distinctly Latin American postmodernist writing of Roberto Bolaño, Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar,[3] within which metafiction is brought into the service of political satire in sometimes subtle, sometimes absurd, and sometimes darkly acerbic ways. As Novey writes, "Zambra is playing around here, but it's high stakes, serious play".[4]

Zambra's text—the test—is in five sections. The first section, entitled "Excluded Term", requires the reader to complete 24 exercises. In each exercise, one word serves as the heading of a list of five other words. The opening words of this section (and of the fictional text as a whole), task the reader with identifying "the word whose meaning has no relation to either the heading or the other words listed" (1). As an example, the first of these exercises is headed "MULTIPLE" (3), and the listed options are

A) manifold

B) numerous

C) untold

D) five

E) two

The second section is titled "Sentence order". In this section, each exercise presents a short list of numbered sentences, followed by a list of five different options for how those sentences could be sequenced. The reader is asked to choose the option that "puts the sentences in the best possible order to form a coherent text" (11). The third section, titled "Sentence Completion", presents sentences with one, two or three words or phrases missing, followed by a list of five different sets of words or phrases which can be used to complete the sentence. The reader is required to select the set which "best fits" the sentence (25). One example of an exercise in this section is

41. And if they have any _____ left, that's what _____ for.

A) energy	sports are
B) hope	reality is
C) illusions	the void is
D) dissent	the cops are
E) neurons	crack cocaine is (28)

In section four, titled "Sentence Elimination", the reader is presented with a numbered list of sentences or paragraphs, followed by a list of five options for which sentence(s) or paragraph(s) can be "eliminated", on the basis that "they either do not add information or are unrelated to the rest of the text" (37). The fifth and final section of the text is titled "Reading Comprehension". This section is comprised of three short stories, each of which is followed by eight multiple choice questions relating to the

[3]For example, see Novey; Wimmer.
[4]Novey.

meaning of the story. For example, following the first story, one question begins "71. One can infer from the text that the teachers at the school:", followed by five options, and the next question begins "72. From this text, one infers that:", again followed by five options (75).

This slight book seems, on the surface, to be simply a game or a formal experiment. Some readers see it as such, and report disappointment, as is evidenced on Goodreads (an Amazon-owned website for social book cataloguing and reviewing). For example, one Goodreads reviewer writes "I just couldn't get past the gimmicky feel of the whole thing. A novel written as a multiple choice test. Cool, I guess. For three or four pages. Then it got a bit old".[5] Another reviewer writes "the form in all but the penultimate sections never really adds much (and I quickly tired of the gimmicks of say having to pick which letter is the correct answer …)".[6] However, for many readers who actually play the game, the text slowly reveals itself to be both subversive and deeply meaningful, as further Goodreads reviews suggest. One reviewer notes "We are asked—as readers to playfully interact—and if we do—we will begin to see under the laughter and silliness".[7] Other reviewers describe what they "see under" the playfulness: one finds that "Our test-maker in 'Sentence Elimination' starts with short sentences, though they are already evocative, and gradually starts talking about family, a hated father, government eliminations, and other soul-baring terrors".[8] Another writes that "There are multiple layers of meaning that can be contemplated by choosing different answers. It's sort of about fathers and sons and dictators among other things".[9] Another reviewer observes

> The first part is full of clever wordplay and becomes surprisingly deep. I don't know how it's possible to convey such emotion in so few words. By part two a story starts to form and come together. It is by turns hilarious and heartbreaking. I don't know much about Chilean history or politics other than a little about Pinochet but this has made me interested in learning more. Although it is quite a short book, I found that I didn't want to rush through it and read one section at a time with time to process and absorb in between.[10]

Other reviewers draw out the darker, critical and satirical threads they perceive. One argues that

> What Zambra accomplishes is, on the one hand, a corruption of the multiple-choice test with critical intent and, on the other hand, a kind of poetic condensation. It is a (bitter) satire […] It's parody and poetry at the same time.[11]

Another summarises the text as a "radical experiment that depicts a solemn reality behind much artifice & minutiae".[12] Another writes

> I was having much fun with Section 1—Excluded Term, justifying to myself why I chose what I thought […] the correct choice should be […]. But the last exercise in this section

[5]MC-1. In all citations from the website Goodreads, the reviewers are anonymized: each is distinguished with MC (for *Multiple Choice*) and a number, following the style used in other articles in this special issue. All citations are presented as they appear online, retaining the original spelling and punctuation.
[6]MC-2.
[7]MC-3.
[8]MC-4.
[9]MC-5.
[10]MC-6.
[11]MC-7.
[12]MC-8.

> alerted me to [the fact that] something more serious is happening here than the author letting me play around with words. As I progressed through each of the sections […] I realized he is laying out the beauty and malice of the Chilean realities.[13]

Another reviewer reflects on how appreciating the text's depths depends on the reader complying with its strategic form:

> This may be the most stylistically unusual book I ever read. Written as a standardized multiple choice test Alejandro Zambra explores the meaning of love, family, politics and storytelling by forcing the reader to choose the best answer […]. I was surprised by how poignant *Multiple Choice* was. […] The trick of this book is that you actually have to do the questions. […] by playing the author's game you can get to see how a tiny detail can shift your perception of the question. Hopefully, too, you will find out why that is important.[14]

As these reviews suggest, many readers find that expending the effort to follow the instructions, and to consider the answer options in relation to the questions, leads them towards rich thematic interpretations involving father-son relationships, life under Pinochet's dictatorship, and more, and also towards a metafictional awareness of semantic nuance, of storytelling conventions, etc.

Further Goodreads reviews also reveal that some readers appreciate the agency that they are performatively afforded in the requirement to make various kinds of decisions about meaning, and also that they derive additional interpretative significance from the metafictional foregrounding of those meaning-making choices and their semantic implications. One reviewer writes of the "Strange and interesting format that has the reader build the meaning and links between provocative possibilities within the brief and poetic narrative. Really makes one think";[15] another comments "It is up to the reader to determine meaning";[16] and another states "The reader gets to participate in the creation of meaning".[17] Another reviewer writes

> This book definitely requires a lot of mental awareness, and it really stimulates your brain. It takes a lot to go through each variation of a passage, and that's what I really liked about this book. […] I went through all of them and genuinely thought about what they all meant. I realized that by taking out a single sentence, or by changing the order of sentences in a passage, it can completely change the meaning … .[18]

Another reviewer similarly suggests that one consequence of fully engaging with the text is an increased sensitivity to the effect upon meaning of even small textual changes, which can give rise to an association between matters of textual choice and interpretative agency and the political and ideological constraints of Pinochet's regime:

> As I spent time playing around with the answer choices and manipulating the sentences, I ended up focusing so much more on what he was saying and how he was saying it. Long after I finished a section or put the book down for a bit, I found myself still pondering what a particular question/passage meant or just the concept that rearranging sentences or choosing to delete a sentence or two can so dramatically change the meaning of a

[13] MC-9.
[14] MC-10.
[15] MC-11.
[16] MC-12.
[17] MC-13.
[18] MC-14.

> particular story. Zambra tackles life, family, Chilean politics, and how education often teaches people to repeat and obey versus learning to think independently.[19]

One of the available interpretations of the text, then, is that in asking the reader to perform these cognitive processing efforts unusually intensely, within the structure of a relentless, challenging and at times obscure test, the author is drawing attention to these processing efforts. A further available interpretation is that the author is doing so in such a way as to present the very nature of guided meaning making, and deriving (or imposing) systems of interpretation and coherence, as central to the text's thematic concerns.

Not all readers are willing to make the effort, or find those processes manageable. For example, one reviewer writes "Presented in test format, I found this to be too much work and often confusing".[20] Another two reviewers said "I really wanted to appreciate this literary experience … But I just didn't get it. Maybe I needed to be in the mood to really think"[21] and "I guess I don't want to work that hard for my entertainment".[22] Though more negative, these reviews testify to the fact that this text invites more interpretative "work" than may initially be expected, and also allude to an expectation of communicative intent behind the design and its entailed additional mental effort, along with the likelihood of some kind of interpretative reward if one were willing to "work that hard" and able to "get it".

As is apparent from the nature of the text's "exercises", and as is highlighted in some of the readers' responses, the metafictional multiple choice form explicitly presents interpretative challenges to the reader. It strategically foregrounds the inferential processes and guided choices involved in deriving and deciding upon meaning, in such a way as to lead readers to infer thematic significance from this salience. Relevance theory is a cognitive pragmatic theory which seeks to explain how people understand and meaningfully communicate with each other. Without intending to suggest that Zambra is in any way consciously engaging with relevance theory in this text, he is nonetheless directly and deeply engaging with precisely the interpretative principles and processes which relevance theory attends to and attempts to account for and explicate. The rest of this article therefore uses relevance theory to analyse in depth quite how Zambra's multiple choice questions can be made meaningful within the context of—and to the extent that they comprise—a work of fiction, in the hope that it can offer insights into the potential inferential processes of readers and the ways in which they are guided by the workings of the text.

An Outline of Relevance Theory

This article seeks to use relevance theory to analyse how the different parts, and the whole, of *Multiple Choice* can be made meaningful by a reader. The analysis also discusses how the very form of the text makes salient exactly those inferential processes that relevance theory seeks to account for and describe, and how inferences derived

[19]MC-15.
[20]MC-16.
[21]MC-17.
[22]MC-18.

from this metafictional salience feed into, or, considered otherwise, help the reader to construe or recover, the novel's thematic critique of Pinochet's dictatorship. For these purposes, a brief outline of some of the fundamental elements of relevance theory will be introduced to provide a basis for the analytical discussion.[23] Further specific ideas within relevance theory will be introduced within the analytical discussion as they become pertinent. In the final section of the article, relevance theory is briefly used to explore how disnarration (which occurs in sections two, three and four of the text) and second person address (which occurs in all but section one) can constructively contribute to interpretations of the text's meanings.

The core tenets of relevance theory are as follows. Relevance theorists (amongst other pragmaticists) believe that every utterance—every spoken, written or otherwise visually signed expression—significantly underdetermines its potential meanings. That is, what is meant by an utterance usually goes far beyond what is actually linguistically encoded in that utterance. This is known as the "radical underdeterminacy thesis".[24] The individual interpreting the utterance has to undertake cognitive processing effort in order to make the utterance "relevant".

An utterance becomes "relevant" to an individual when it becomes usefully meaningful to them, in the sense that the derived interpretation of the utterance makes "a worthwhile difference to the way an individual represents [i.e., conceptualises, understands] the world". This worthwhile difference in worldview is termed a "positive cognitive effect". One (cognitive) principle of relevance theory is that "human cognition tends to be geared towards the maximisation of relevance", which is achieved by seeking to attain "the greatest amount of positive cognitive effects for the least amount of processing effort". A second (communicative) principle of relevance is that "every ostensive stimulus [e.g., an utterance] conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance". That is, it is presumed to be sufficiently relevant to warrant "the audience's processing effort", and to be as relevant as possible within the bounds of "the communicator's abilities and preferences".[25] Relatedly, the presumption of "ostensive-inferential communication" describes the communicator's demonstrative manifestation of an intention to inform the addressee of something, and the addressee's recognition of this and inferences on this basis.[26] All of this leads to the crux of relevance theory—the "relevance-guided comprehension heuristic": addressees "follow the path of least effort" in interpreting utterances (that is, in processing positive cognitive effects)—in deriving, and testing, possible interpretations—and addressees stop this interpretative act when their expectations of relevance are met.[27]

Interpretations of an utterance are derived in the form of explicatures and implicatures. Explicatures are generally conceived as the linguistically encoded propositional content of the utterance.[28] Wilson argues that propositions, in this theoretical context, can be broadly construed, and can include images and states of mind which cannot be easily or precisely articulated in words.[29] Implicatures are indirectly communicated,

[23]For a full account of relevance theory, including its evolution and ongoing debates, see Clark, *Relevance Theory*.
[24]Carston, "Pragmatics and Linguistic Underdeterminacy."
[25]Clark, *Relevance Theory*, 363 (see also 29–33).
[26]Ibid., 112–14.
[27]Ibid., 366.
[28]Ibid., 171–83.
[29]Wilson, 200.

pragmatically inferable meanings which are not linguistically encoded in the utterance, but can be derived through combining explicatures and the addressee's contextual assumptions.[30] For example, if a communicator states "The dog looks hungry", the addressee may derive the straightforward explicature "The dog appears to be expressing a desire for food". Notably, the cognitive processing entailed in deriving explicatures in this case involves reference assignment (here, identifying which particular dog is being referred to with the referring expression "the dog"), which is one issue in the ongoing debate about how far explicatures are linguistically encoded or pragmatically inferred.[31] A non-exhaustive list of potential implicatures that the addressee may infer and consider includes:

- The dog may not have eaten in some time.
- Someone ought to feed the dog.
- The communicator is attentive to the dog's needs.
- The communicator wishes to convey that they are attentive to the dog's needs.
- The communicator is chastising themselves for not having fed the dog earlier.
- The communicator is chastising the addressee for not having fed the dog earlier.

The kinds of contextual assumptions which may have a bearing on the implicatures which the addressee infers and considers are:

- Whose responsibility it is to feed the dog.
- Whether or not it would be good for the dog to eat at this point (not so if, for example, the dog is on restricted intake prior to a medical procedure).
- Whether or not it is a particularly good sign that the dog is hungry (if, for example, they are recovering from illness and an appetite suggests improved health).
- Whether or not food for the dog is actually available.
- Whether or not it is possible to feed the dog (i.e., whether or not both the dog food and the dog are accessible).

Other contextual factors may have a bearing on available implicatures, such as whether the communicator and addressee are in a shared space, or the communicator is speaking to the addressee remotely via a phone, etc.

Both explicatures and implicatures can be relatively strong or weak. Put simply, stronger implicatures are more directly evidenced within an utterance, and less plausibly deniable. Weaker implicatures are inferences from an utterance which are reasonably logical, but are less directly evidenced in the utterance, and could be proven to be incorrect derivations in the light of a subsequent utterance which in itself does not contradict the first utterance. For example, within the list of implicatures above, inferable from the utterance "The dog looks hungry", the implicatures that the communicator is chastising themselves or the addressee for not having fed the dog earlier are arguably only weakly communicated by this utterance alone, in that the communicator could follow this with an utterance such as "It's nearly his dinner time. I'll feed him", which contradicts any implication

[30]Clark, *Relevance Theory*, 171–83.
[31]Ibid., 171–5.

that the dog ought to have been fed earlier without directly contradicting the original utterance at all. As Clark explains, the "tentative hypotheses about explicit and implicit content are constructed and adjusted in parallel, guided in order to satisfy the addressee's expectations of relevance"—a process termed the "mutual parallel adjustment process".[32]

Relevance theorists have taken various positions in the broader debate about whether or not the inferential and interpretative operations involved in literary reading are different to those involved in other kinds of communication and non-literary reading.[33] Wilson, among others, argues that the same pragmatic processes and principles are in play, irrespective of whether or not a reader approaches the text as a literary object.[34] Nonetheless, in the case of literary reading, Wilson and other theorists variably hypothesise that the reader is more likely to bring to the text particular expectations about the nature, accessibility, multiplicity and relative strength of interpretative inferences. More specifically, when approaching a work as a piece of literature, a reader may be more likely to expect to expend more cognitive effort in accessing a wider range of potentially relevant implicatures, some of which may be rich, and some (or all) of which may be relatively "weak" in strength. Sperber and Wilson, and later Pilkington, refer to an array of weak implicatures derived from literary reading as "poetic effects".[35] Also, in literary reading, a reader may be more likely to expect that some "looser interpretations" may be relevant—that is, implicatures which are based on an inference that language is being used "loosely", as in the case of approximations and figurative expressions (though this is not to say that figurative expressions are particular to literature, or that figurative interpretations may not be accessed more quickly than literal interpretations in some cases).[36] Furthermore, in literary reading a reader may expect a greater likelihood that an utterance may be too vague or partial to facilitate a full representation of any propositional content it may have (though again, such cases are in no way exclusive to literary discourse).[37] In such cases, implicatures are still possible, and indeed an inference that the creator is intentionally obscuring explicatures, and hypotheses as to what they may be intending to communicate in doing so, may feed into those implicatures.[38]

Zambra's *Multiple Choice* speaks to the central foci of relevance theory in several respects. One of the more obvious ways in which it does so is, on the one hand, in its obscuring of any clear explicatures—any easily derivable propositional content—giving rise to, and making salient, a rich array of weak implicatures, and, on the other hand, in its explicit requirement that the reader decides upon one interpretation (via the imperative encoded in the "multiple choice" task). The ostentatious simultaneity of these absurdly paradoxical textual strategies becomes part of the text's derivable satire on the Kafkaesque constraints of Pinochet's regime.

Relatedly, another way in which *Multiple Choice* intersects with relevance theory is that, while it is not uncommon for literary reading to involve interpretative challenges, the form of this text does create more challenges than usual, and, as several Goodreads

[32]Ibid., 366.
[33]Pilkington; Furlong.
[34]Clark, "Salient Inferences"; Furlong; Wilson.
[35]Sperber and Wilson, 193–224; Pilkington, *Poetic Effects*; Furlong; Clark, "Salient Inferences."
[36]Wilson, 192–3; Clark, *Relevance Theory*, 254–8.
[37]Clark, *Relevance Theory*, 204–7.
[38]Ibid.

reviewers have conveyed, playing the "game" requires greater cognitive processing effort than more conventional prose fiction. As Clark states, "the key idea within relevance theory is that the addressees begin by assuming that the communicator has an interpretation in mind which justifies the expenditure of effort involved in arriving at it".[39] Many of the cited Goodreads reviews indicate that some readers find the cognitive expenditure required by the processing challenges entailed in this text to be appropriately rewarding, and also confidently express interpretations which suggest perceived authorial intention relating to these processing challenges.

The first two sections of this article have introduced Zambra's *Multiple Choice*, outlined relevance theory, and broadly indicated some of the interesting relationships between the two in the light of a range of reader reviews. The next section of the article develops an analysis of the book using relevance theory. This analysis focuses on section one of the text, which, as will be shown, effectively establishes the foregrounded meaning-making practices employed in the book, through which it begins to facilitate particular local and global inferences. The final, shorter section of this article briefly surveys the augmentations of these meaning-making practices, and resultant inferences, in the later sections of the book. It also reflects on the inferential processes used to derive coherent implicatures from the text's employment of second-person address and disnarration.

Testing Meanings

As previously mentioned, the exercises in section one, entitled "Excluded term", require the reader to read a word and, beneath that, a list of five other words. The reader is tasked with selecting and discarding one of the five words in the list on grounds of irrelevance to the word at the head of the list and to the other words in the list. The first three of these exercises are presented as follows:

1. MULTIPLE

A) manifold

B) numerous

C) untold

D) five

E) two

2. CHOICE

A) voice

B) one

C) decision

[39]Clark, *Relevance Theory*, 7.

D) preference

E) alternative

3. YOURS

A) hers

B) his

C) mine

D) their

E) ours (3)

How, then, is the reader to make these lists, and the task of excluding a word, communicative and meaningful in this context? It is not unusual for the openings of novels to include utterances which are significantly underdetermined (through, for example, the use of names and definite referring expressions for which reference assignment, within the fictional world of the story, cannot yet be achieved).[40] However, fiction usually begins with sentences which offer at least some propositional content. The test format is likely to be unexpected by any readers who have not taken the book title literally, or read the blurb or reviews. The format is, nonetheless, likely to be recognisable and familiar to most readers, albeit not in the context of fiction. As Natasha Wimmer writes, discussing Zambra's use of cliché in his earlier short story collection *My Documents*, "Zambra knows how to turn the familiar inside out, but he also knows how to wrap us up in it".[41] Readers who choose to continue reading must accept the test format and adapt their interpretative strategies in response.

The first list is headed with the word "multiple", which can at least be easily associated with the text's title. In reading the list, one available implicature, based on the assumption of communicative intent (that is, the second, "communicative" principle of relevance, that every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance), is that the author may be using the first multiple choice exercise to offer particular definitions and synonyms of "multiple", amongst the list of answer options, in order to communicate the sense of this word which will be relevant to the text (that is, to help guide the reader's interpretation of the text as a whole). Most of the answer options seem to support this interpretation, as the first two answer options are synonyms of "multiple" and the last two answer options are examples of "multiples".

The third answer option presents more of an interpretative challenge. In order to try to assess the relevance of the word "untold" to the word "multiple", a reader might actively recall the ways in which they have encountered "untold" being used, or things with which "untold" is conventionally associated. For example, "untold" can be used in relation to secrets, to things deliberately left unsaid (in comparison to things accidentally omitted or deliberately "told"). "Untold" can also be used to express an incalculable multitude of usually negative things, e.g., untold atrocities, untold deaths. Accessing the

[40]Clark, "Manipulating Inferences," 130.
[41]Wimmer.

latter sense of the word "untold" enables a reader to recognise its relationship to "multiple". Notably, the negativity of the associations (and also, perhaps, the fact that those associations are only subtly evoked, not explicitly "told") may impel the reader to question the relevance of this potentially more sinister answer option to the text's themes, though is it not possible to draw inferences at this stage. One weak implicature which may therefore arise from this exercise is "Large multitudes can be associated with bad events or outcomes".

A reader may seek to develop interpretative hypotheses, at this point, as to why the fourth answer option is "five" and the fifth option is "two"—that is, why the author has chosen these numbers, both being very specific "multiples", unlike the preceding answer options. One explanation for the relevance of "five" can be inferred if the reader observes that in the three exercises immediately visible on this page (and, the reader will find, in most of the exercises in the book,) the "multiple" of answers from which the reader can choose is five (labelled A to E). "Two", as an option, is by comparison more restrictive, particularly if associated with options someone is permitted to choose between, and seems even more so after following synonyms of implicitly large multitudes. One potential weak implicature here may be that, in the light of the previous answer options, "a multiple of two choices is comparatively few choices".

The most significant interpretative challenge for the reader, in engaging with exercise one, is that none of the words seems to fit the criteria of having no relationship to the word at the head of the list or to the other words in the list. Thus, this multiple choice exercise is logically impossible to complete. Similarly, in exercise three, it is hard to derive a way in which any one of the five answer options, "A) hers", "B) his", "C) mine", "D) their" and "E) ours", is not connected to the heading word, "YOURS", or other words in the list. An attempt to distinguish the interpretative significance, and thereby relative relevance, of the answer options to each other and the heading word, and of this exercise to the potential meanings of the text, may lead the reader to consider the list in the context of the preceding two exercises. For example, exercise two offers the words "A) voice", "B) one", "C) decision", "D) preference" and "E) alternative" as options beneath the heading word "CHOICE". In considering how the answer options are associated with the heading, the reader will access and draw on the relevant parts of their prior understanding of that word (the encyclopaedic information they have mentally stored about the concept(s) denoted by that word, including associated connotations). Through this process, a reader might arrive at an array of weak implicatures such as "To make a choice is to have a voice" or "Making a choice involves actively voicing it"; "You can only choose one option, thus choice means sacrificing other options"; "A choice is a decision"; "A choice is driven by preference" or "A choice is the assertion of a preference", and so on. In reflecting on the relationships between the words in the list, as part of evaluating which word has the least relevance as instructed, a reader may derive the implicature "The acts of making a decision and voicing something both involve agency". With all of these senses and associations of "choice" activated, the list of possessive pronouns in exercise three can be more easily made relevant, specifically by considering them as possible response to the questions "Whose choice? Whose voice? Whose decision?".

Several points within Carston's relevance theoretic discussion of polysemy, homonymy and ad hoc concepts provide further understanding of the kinds of processes

involved in making sense of these exercises (that is, the processes involved in deriving reasonable and useful implicatures, and thus positive cognitive effects).[42] Carston explains polysemy as the case of a single word which can be used to express a range of "distinct (but related) senses".[43] The meaning of a word is mentally stored as a "'polysemy complex', that is, a bundle or cluster of conventionalised interrelated senses". Carston distinguishes polysemy from homonymy, and describes the latter as the case of "several distinct words that happen (through some sort of historical accident) to have the same phenomenological form although their meanings are unrelated". Carston notes, additionally, that each of a set of homonyms may be polysemous (as many words are).[44]

Addressees use pragmatic processes to infer which particular sense of a word, within its "polysemy complex", is most relevant in the utterance in which the word is being used, and/or to infer that a word is being used in a narrower or broader sense than its usual meanings (i.e., than the range of meanings in its conventionalised polysemy complex), and/or to distinguish between polysemy and homonymy. To recap, Carston summarises this process as follows:

> following the relevance-based comprehension heuristic, the addressee infers the intended concept/sense, using the clues the speaker has provided, including syntactic constraints and the concept [linguistically] encoded by the [word being used], which is activated [in the mind of the addressee] by the utterance, together with its most accessible encyclopaedic information [i.e., the addressee's mentally stored 'encyclopedic entry' of information about the concept(s) the word conventionally denotes], which in turn is partially determined by activation spreading from other concepts encoded by the utterance. The inferential process stops once the hypothesized interpretation satisfies expectations of relevance.[45]

In making sense of "voice" as an answer option somehow relevant to "choice", the reader follows this process to reach the verb sense of the word, to "voice" something (i.e., different from, but related to, the potentially more directly accessible sense of the word when used as a noun—a "voice"). The same process is also used to determine whether the relationships being drawn upon within a list are polysemous meanings of one word, or whether homonyms are also being introduced. For example, the head word of the list in exercise 8 is "BEAR". The first three answers are synonyms of the verb "bear" in the sense of "withstand" ("endure", "tolerate" and "abide"). The fourth and fifth answers, however, are species of the particular type of mammal referred to with the homonymous noun "bear" (5). This kind of sudden and unsignalled shift to a seemingly otherwise irrelevant homonymous sense, much like playing with puns, may account for some readers' derivation of silliness and humour, as reported in the surveyed Goodreads reviews.

One way in which Carston's summary adds to the outline of relevance theory provided earlier in this article is by indicating how nearby words, and surrounding syntax, can contribute to the cues guiding inference of relevant implicatures. A significant challenge in deriving meaningful interpretations from the exercises in section one of the text is the lack of syntactic constraints, as each word in the lists appears in syntactic isolation.

[42]Carston, "Ad Hoc Concepts."
[43]Ibid., 151.
[44]Ibid., 153.
[45]Carston, "Ad Hoc Concepts," 155.

However, as has been illustrated in relation to exercises one, two and three, the preceding and subsequent words in each list, and indeed preceding and subsequent lists, though not as semantically constraining as syntax, can be drawn upon as partial cues. Also, in some cases, the list heading word and one or more words in the list can be made relevant to each other by considering them in different syntactic relationships to each other. For example, returning to the discussion of exercise two (3), while "decision" can be made relevant to the list heading word "choice" as a near synonym, "one" can be made relevant when positioned as a determiner of "choice" (i.e., "one choice"), and "voice" can be made relevant when configured as a verb, denoting a specific action in relation "a choice" (i.e., "to voice a choice").

The apparent value of preceding words and lists as cues is based on common pragmatic expectations of "internal relevance". As Wilson writes, "expectations of 'internal' relevance arise in the context of the preceding text and guide the interpretation of subsequent text". That is, the interpretation of each segment of text "is affected by what has gone before and creates expectations of relevance for what comes after, with the resulting interpretations being mutually adjusted with each other".[46] This notion also captures the ways in which a reader's dynamic development of a "global" understanding of the text overall (from which they can draw interpretative conclusions, e.g., about overarching themes) is informed by inferences about local segments of the text, and vice versa.[47] An expectation of internal relevance serves as a useful guide for implicatures in some of the exercises in this section. The semantic associations of the words listed, the order in which they are listed, and the interrelationships between them, can all help to guide implicatures, both about local meanings, and about potential global interpretations of the text's overarching themes (more weakly at this stage, and more close to impressions than fully fledged propositions), which may subsequently be supported or disconfirmed.

However, as has already been illustrated, the expectation of internal relevance is frequently subverted, and this subversion itself offers up further meanings. This particular thread of metafictional play with meaning making, which these early exercises start to reveal, runs through all five of the book's sections: the reader will find that within each section, sets of expectations are established with regards to how the reader should interpret the question and derive the answer, and then these expectations are serially and multifariously flouted, requiring new strategies of sense-making. While in section one, exercise one, the shift from synonyms or near synonyms of "multiple" to numerical examples of multiples could be considered a minor case in point, the example of the sudden introduction of the otherwise irrelevant homonymous sense of "bear" within exercise eight is a better example of the more extreme, and more absurd, subversions of patterns of internal relevance that frequently occur within and between these lists. Another example is exercise seven, in which, in a list headed "MASK", options "A) disguise", "B) veil", "C) hood" and "D) face" have a more obvious relation to the heading word, as near synonyms, subtypes, or a part of the body which can be masked, whereas "E) confront" is instead a near synonym of a different sense of the previous answer option "D) face" (5). In exercise 11, the heading word is "LETTER". Answer options "A) uppercase", "B) lowercase" and "C) cursive"

[46]Wilson, 202.
[47]Clark, "Manipulating Inferences," 136–7.

are all examples of typographic options for the presentation of letters of the alphabet, whereas options "D) dead" and "E) silent" have very different relations to the heading word (6). "Dead" can be made relevant via activation (i.e., mental recalling) of the noun phrase "dead letter", which refers to mail (a homonymous, different use of the word "letter") which does not or cannot reach its intended recipient. In the context of a work of fiction in which patterns of meaning making are seemingly intentionally upturned, and multiple choice questions are logically impossible to answer, this gains metafictional significance: one possible weak implicature derivable from the text's inclusion of the concept of the dead letter, inferring a more expanded, metaphorical meaning, is "Some messages never get through to the addressee", or even "Some efforts to communicate messages fail". Considering "silent" as a premodifying adjective and activating the concept "silent letter" evokes phonological (as opposed to typographical) features of a letter, thus returning the reader to the same alphabet-related sense of "letter" as is interpretable in relation to "uppercase", "lowercase" and "cursive". This may be the most easily accessible relation for the fifth answer option. However, in the light of "dead letter", and recalling the answer option "untold" in exercise one, it is possible that the concept of a "silenced letter" may be evoked (i.e., censored mail, which again draws on the different, homonymous mail-related use of "letter"). The very next task (exercise 12) subverts patterns of meaning making similarly. A list headed "CUT" is followed by the answer options "A) erase", "B) annul", "C) blot", "D) expunge", and finally "E) wound" (6). The answer options "erase" and "blot" tend to be used in relation to cutting text, and "expunge" can be used to refer to redacting text (and this sense is likely to be more easily activated than usual due to the co-textual cues of "erase" and "blot"), whereas "annul" is more directly associated retracting something in the sense of legally voiding or invalidating it. The final answer option, "E) wound", however, is relevant to a wholly different sense of the word "cut"—one which evokes infliction of injury. Connecting the lists in exercises 11 and 12, some readers may begin to derive a loose association of legalised oppression: within legal discourse (thus, in senses less accessible to most readers, but potentially cued by the connection), the records of a previous conviction can be "expunged" (exercise 12, answer option D) in the sense of being made unavailable (that is, in a way, "untold"), and, a "dead letter" (exercise 11, answer option D) can also refer to a law which, though not repealed, is defunct. These meanings become more available as the reader (re-)considers each list in the light of the other.

Many of the sudden shifts in patterns of meaning making simultaneously deliver a shift to more sinister implications. To offer some further examples, in exercise 14 the heading word "BLACKLIST" is followed by a list of other kinds of lists, all in compound noun forms, for example "B) checklist", "C) playlist", etc. The marked exception to this pattern of compound nouns, and to the pattern of their relation to the heading word, is "E) novelist" (7). The playful combination of similarity with and subversion of the preceding answer options creates humour, but its relation to the heading word is much darker than those preceding options, evoking political contexts in which novelists have been put on government blacklists. In exercise 16, five senses of the heading word "PROTECT" are presented (8). Three of these are the more positive kind, e.g., "A) care for". One sense is "D) watch over", the most accessible association with which may also be positive, in the sense of protect from harm, but another sense may be accessible—to surveil. Another answer option is "B) cover for" which evokes a particular kind

of protection: covert and complicit protection of a person due to them having done something which some other person or force views as a contravention, from whom protection is thus necessary. Exercise 17 then presents the most radical subversion, thus far, of the excluded term multiple choice task, in that the heading word "PROMISE" is followed by "A) complete", "B) silence", "C) promise", "D) complete", "E) silence" (8). This list is therefore one phrase repeated twice: "promise complete silence". A reader may reasonably infer a weak implicature such as "A promise of complete silence is necessary due to some threat". In the light of the preceding lists, the reader could hypothesise various additional weak implicatures, including: "A novelist is promising self-censorship to comply with a political regime and to avoid being blacklisted, for their own protection"; "Someone is promising to not reveal a contravening act by someone else, to protect them"; and, "Words or acts are being consciously left untold in order to protect people from being erased or wounded".

Exercise 23 offers different kinds of support for some of these implicatures: the head word is "SILENCE" and the answer options are "A) fidelity", "B) complicity", "C) loyalty", "D) conspiracy" and "E) cowardice". In the final exercise of this first section, in a kind of climax of the absurdist flouting of the excluded term multiple choice task, the head word of the list is again "SILENCE", and all five of the answer options are "silence" too (10).

As these examples indicate, even the cases of more extreme, absurd and obscure shifts can productively serve to make some local implicatures available. However, the subversion of internal relevance is, as has been shown, not the only means by which the author can be inferred to be deliberately undermining particular conventions of certain discourses. In most of the exercises in this section, there is no logically correct answer, as every word in each list has some kind of inferable relation to the list heading or to another word in the list. This, in itself, creates a kind absurdism. The reader may be encouraged to look for further communicative intent and derivable implicature behind these absurdist and subversive strategies in and of themselves.

The implicature "A novelist is promising self-censorship to comply with a political regime and to avoid being blacklisted, for their own protection" offers a means by which the multiple choice format of the text can be made relevant: if writing novels is not possible, or is dangerous, then a writer must communicate their meaning in another format. Two potential global implicatures—hypothetical implicatures that are based on initial representations of the text as a whole, to be further tested as the reader proceeds[48]—are, firstly, that this text is presented in the form of a multiple choice test as a literary comment on the censorship of novelists, and of the kinds of political thought with which novelists are often associated, under an oppressive political regime, and, secondly, that the parodying and subversion of the form is a reflection of the absurdism of life, and in particular of the restrictions, under that regime. Some readers may bring to the text an awareness of the Chilean Academic Aptitude Test, the fact that the author is Chilean, and some knowledge of Pinochet's dictatorship, including that novelists and other writers who, during Pinochet's rule, published work which could be considered to be critical of the regime were at risk of being imprisoned, tortured, executed, or mysteriously and forcibly "disappeared"[49]—their fates "untold"—hence many ending up in

[48]Ibid., 133–7.
[49]Ensalaco.

exile. For these readers, the global implicatures outlined here are likely to be more strongly and quickly inferred, and more richly fleshed out. However, for all readers, the strengthening and specifying of these kinds of global implicatures is made possible as the reader progresses though the text and starts to encounter explicit references to Pinochet's dictatorship (24, 39, 54–8), the Chilean constitution (27), and the Chilean Academic Aptitude Test (65–76), which is ultimately explicitly named as the structural basis of the text in a page headed "A note on the text" at the book's close (104).

This section of the article has illustrated some of the ways in which the text exploits, taxes and foregrounds readers' inferential processes, and how this contributes to the text's local and global interpretable meanings, through a detailed analysis of section one of the text. The next section of the article discusses the further extensions and variations of these same playful meaning-making strategies that occur in sections two to five of the text, and pays particular attention to the involvement of second-person narration and disnarration in these strategies.

Local, Global, Deictic and Disnarrated Meanings

Section two of the text presents a numbered list of sentences, followed by five lists of numbers signalling different ways of ordering the numbered sentences. The reader must choose "the best possible order to form a coherent text" (11). In doing so, the reader must test out the different answer options, and comparatively evaluate the implicatures made available by each re-ordering. One example which illustrates the different implicatures made available through re-ordering is exercise 27, headed "A child":

(1) You dream that you lose a child.

(2) You wake up.

(3) You cry.

(4) You lose a child.

(5) You cry.

A) 1–2–4–3–5

B) 1–2–3–5–4

C) 2–3–4–5–1

D) 3–4–5–1–2

E) 4–5–3–1–2 (15)

Some of the ways in which the re-ordering alters available implicatures are: In answer options A and B, the dream of losing a child precedes the reality of losing a child, thus making available the implicature that the dream was a premonition. In answer option D, "You cry" is the first sentence, preceding both the dream and the reality of losing the child, thus making available the potential implicature "The loss of the child was anticipated". In answer options A, B and E, sentences 3 and 5 are put together, creating "You cry. You cry". Such direct repetition is unusual, thus foregrounded, thereby

making strongly available implicatures such as "The misery is extreme" and "The weeping continues for a long time". Though the available implicatures vary depending on the order of sentences, none of the orders presented by the answer options offers more "coherence" than the others, and thus, as per section one of the text, none of the answer options allow the reader to logically complete the exercise.

Also as per section one, the apparent conventions of the question, and patterns in ways of making the answer options meaningful, are subverted in ways which give rise to further local and global inferences. For example, in exercise 32, each answer option is the repetition of one sentence (e.g., answer option A is "1-1-1-1-1") (20). In exercise 33, the final answer option omits one of the listed sentences (poignantly, the omitted sentence is "You are not crazy", the omission of which, in this answer, makes available the implicature that "You *are* crazy") (21). In exercises 35 and 36, meanwhile, each answer option is identical, making available the implicatures "The 'choice' of an answer is artificial or an illusion" and "There is only one order in which the sentences in these exercises make sense" (23–4). Both of these implicatures recall the first exercises in section one, together with which they potentially evoke broader implicatures regarding the illusion of freedom, choice, agency, predetermination, etc., which can further support the global inference of a thematic critique of Pinochet.

In section three, exercises present statements with missing words or phrases, and a list of options for their completion, from which the reader is asked to choose the option which "best fits" the sentence. Whichever option best fits the sentence depends on what the reader infers the author may be trying to communicate (as per the presumption of "ostensive-inferential communication").[50] All answer options in all exercises in this section make sense (grammatically, semantically and logically), and make available a range of implicatures, thus again the required task is logically impossible to complete. Early exercises in this section are more playful, particularly in the ways in which they shift from light to dark, and superficial to serious, associations—for example:

41. And if they have any _____ left, that's what _____ for.

A) energy	sports are
B) hope	reality is
C) illusions	the void is
D) dissent	the cops are
E) neurons	crack cocaine is (28)

In later exercises in this section, most of the statements refer to fathers, sons, or writing, contributing to global implicatures relating to the expression of difficult father-son relationships and to the risks of writing, and the challenges of shaping or finding meaning, under Pinochet's dictatorship. Exercise 37 presents the sentence "_____ the thousand amendments they've made to it, the Chilean Constitution of 1980 is a piece of shit", along with the answer options "A) After", "B) Due to", "C) In spite of", "D) Thanks to" and "E) Notwithstanding" (27). Some of the humour here lies in the fact that the answer options C and E are arguably similar or related, as are B and D; that the two pairs are very different to each other; and yet the explicature

[50]Clark, *Relevance Theory*, 112–14.

derivable from the main clause remains the same, irrespective of the answer option. Among several exercises which make metafictional implications available, exercise 46 presents the sentence "I want to gather these words together, _____ nothing makes any sense", and the answer options "A) though", "B) so that", "C) even if", "D) but" and "E) until" (30). Despite the apparent similarities with exercise 37, the meanings of the words in the answers, and the derivable implicatures afforded by these answers, are notably more distinct. Expectations with regards to how answers will relate to the question are subverted, as in the prior sections of the text. For example, in exercise 53, there are three missing phrases in the sentence, and each answer option repeats the same missing phrase (32). Notwithstanding exercise 37, the exercises in this section foreground the degree to which changing one word can significantly impact available implicatures. The fact that exercise 37 is an outlier in this regard makes available the inference that the assertion that "the Chilean Constitution of 1980 is a piece of shit" is being overtly foregrounded.

Section four requires the reader to choose which sentences or paragraphs "can be eliminated" on the grounds that "they do not add information or are unrelated to the rest of the text" (35). The presumption of "ostensive-inferential communication" (introduced in section two of this article) accounts for why the first of these grounds is nonsensical: the very nature of an ostensive act of communication entails the communicator's demonstrative manifestation of an intention to inform the addressee of something, and the addressee's recognition of this and act of inference on this basis.[51] The communicative, second principle of relevance (also introduced in section two of this article) explains why the second of these grounds is also nonsensical, in that "every ostensive stimulus [e.g., an utterance] conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance".[52] The absurdity of the instructions is proven by the exercises. For example, exercise 57 is as follows:

(1) A curfew is a regulation prohibiting free circulation in public within a determined area.

(2) It tends to be decreed in times of war or popular uprising.

(3) The dictatorship imposed one in Santiago, Chile, from September 11, 1973, until January 2, 1987.

(4) One summer evening my father went out walking with no destination in mind. It grew late, and he had to sleep at a friend's house.

(5) They made love, she got pregnant, I was born.

A) None

B) 5

C) 1, 2, and 3

D) 4 and 5

E) 2 (39)

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 363 (see also 29–33).

None of the numbered sentences offers no information. Relevance can again be evaluated, and two of the answer options, C and D, split the story, so that from C implicatures about the nature of Pinochet's dictatorship can be inferred, with no implicatures available about the narrator's inception, whereas in D the reverse is the case. Similarly, in exercise 62, the answer options offer up elimination of some sentences narrating a contextually relevant flashback, and elimination of every sentence except the those narrating the flashback (45–7). However, as none of the answer options (B) to (E) in exercise 57 offers no information, and as relevance is generally sought and inferred from every ostensive communicative act, the only feasible answer is "A) None", which is the first option in every list of answer options in this section.

In theory it would be possible for a reader to infer that one or more sentences within a list lack relevance to the rest of the sentences in that list. However, in such cases, the communicative principle suggests that the reader would seek meaning value from this apparent irrelevance, and thus a derivation of some kind of relevance is entailed either way. Nonetheless, in processing section four's sentences and answer options fully, the reader will find that there are no irrelevant sentences: so tasked, in accordance with the "relevance-guided comprehension heuristic",[53] it is possible to make every sentence relevant.

Notably, patterns in answer options are again subverted in this section, such that some sets of optional answers direct the reader to test and compare information value and relevance hypotheses differently (or, indeed, not at all). For example, in exercise 58, the answer options are "A) None", "B) A", "C) B", "D) C" and "E) D" (thus, all are effectively "A) None") (40), and exercise 65 presents the answer options "A) None", "B) All", "C) Any", "D) A" and "E) B" (58).

Section 5 presents three short stories, each of which is followed by comprehension questions. For example, the first story describes how some school children learn to cheat on multiple-choice tests, and how their retired teacher, who seemingly condoned the strategy, tells the school children the tale of a pair of twins who successfully cheated on the Academic Aptitude Test, and went on to become highly valued, corrupt lawyers. One question following this first story is

68. The best title for this story would be:

(A) "How to Train Your Twin"

(B) "To Sir, with Love"

(C) "Me and My Shadow"

(D) "Against Lawyers"

(E) "Against Twin Lawyers" (73)

Comparative evaluation of each title (all of which "fit" the story) will foreground different aspects of the story—those aspects, and their associated implicatures and the potential resultant interpretations, which allow the title to make the most sense and to be maximally relevant. Other questions, as mentioned in the first section of this article, begin

[53]Clark, *Relevance Theory*, 366.

"71. One can infer from the text that the teachers at the school:", and "72. From this text, one infers that:", each followed by five options (75). Similarly to the question on titles, these two questions invite a kind of reversal of the conventional cognitive inferential process outlined by relevance theory. Here the reader is presented with a list of inferences and then asked to deduce if and how they could be derived from the story, i.e., through what sets of implicatures, each with what relative strength or weakness.

In this section, the subversion of expectations with regards to meaning relations predominantly arises in the satirical, radically varied register, formality, insight, and degree of objectivity vs. subjectivity involved in both the questions and the answers. Compare the following questions and selected answer options, for example: "83. The comparison between having a child and having a pet aims to show: […] C) The importance of passing laws regarding responsible pet ownership" (96) and "86. Which of the following characters in the story do you relate to? […] D) The father's parents and the mother. But also the father a little, and the son. And that poor little puppy, Cosmo" (97). Beyond this kind of variation, only one exercise is otherwise aberrant in its affordances with regards to deriving inferences. Question 74, which relates to the story seemingly condoning cheating on the Academic Aptitude Test, is "Which of Mr. Segovia's following statements is, in your opinion, true?" However, every answer option is the same: "You weren't educated, you were trained" (88). The combination of the explicit inclusion, in the question, of the solicitation of the addressee's opinion, the availability of only one (repeated) answer, and the nature of this answer, is sardonic. From the nature of the texts, questions and answers in this section, it is possible to infer implicatures such as "The Academic Aptitude Test was seriously flawed and lacked rigour and coherence", "The Academic Aptitude Test was based on an erroneous understanding of how meaning is derived", and "The Academic Aptitude Test was a mechanism within a system which used education as vehicle of oppression, in which independent thought was not permitted and choice was illusory".

Two further aspects of Zambra's metafictional play with meaning making in sections two to five warrant brief discussion. Firstly, the text makes frequent use of second-person address, particularly in sections two and three. For example, the list of sentences in exercise 25 is:

(1) Your father argued with your mother.

(2) Your mother argued with your brother.

(3) Your brother argued with your father.

(4) It was almost always cold.

(5) That is all you remember. (13)

Such uses of the deictic second-person pronoun "you" (as with any use of deictic expressions) require recourse to contextual information to infer the referent.[54] However, the requisite contextual information, in this case, is lacking. Given that this and the subsequent section proceed to convey memories, some of which involve explicit references to Pinochet's regime, the reader could infer that the "you" is functioning as a

[54]Ibid., 19.

form of self-address on the part of the narrator—a form of "I-you transfer", in Herman's terms.[55] Alternatively, it may be functioning in a more "doubly deictic" fashion, potentially also simultaneously implicating the reader, inviting them to project into the position of that "you",[56] thus disorientatingly evoking immersion in the lived experiences of Pinochet's regime. And yet, the referent of "you" seems to shift around over the course of the text. To offer another example, the list of sentences in exercise 58 is:

(1) I didn't want to talk about you, but it's inevitable.

(2) I'm talking about you right now. And you're reading this, and you know it's about you.

(3) Now I am words that you read and wish did not exist.

(4) I hate you.

[…]

(8) You ruined my life.

(9) Now I am words you cannot erase. (40)

This use of "you" may be an instance of what Herman terms "fictionalised address", in which the "you" entails address to a character within the fictional world.[57] There are some contextual cues to suggest that this "you"-addressee is the father of the speaker, not least the repeated featuring of fathers and sons in exercises 51–54 (31–3), and the descriptions of the father's actions leading to the son's conception in the aforementioned immediately preceding exercise, 57 (39). However, this and any other implicatures regarding the referent of "you" will remain weak without further support and in the face of any further conflicting cues.

Part of the difficultly with assigning a referent to "you" within sections two and three is the fact that the "I"—the narrator in the text, where there is an identifiable first-person voice in a conventional sense—is not clearly defined. The narrator is unnamed, is not described, and can be understood mainly through how they describe and respond to others.[58] Sections four and five involve substantially more first-person narrative. Within these sections, some consistency develops with respect to the language used and attitudes expressed by the I-speaker, such that a particular voice becomes recognisable in some places (e.g., the lists within which the speaker conveys memories, in section 4). There is sufficient consistency to facilitate appreciation of cases in which the I-speaker is markedly different, and a distinct character, such as the unnamed misogynistic and racist I-speaker in exercise 63, the son of the head of the Chilean secret police in exercise 64, and the casual and crass ghost-writer in exercise 65 (48–58). At the end of the text, the third story of section five begins "Pay no mind, my son, to what I tell you. […] I don't mean erase these words, which in and of themselves are liquid, perishable. Rather, erase me completely, as if I'd never existed. I know that is impossible. That's what life consists of, I'm afraid: erasing and being erased" (89). This extract recalls section four's act of eliminating one or more sentences or paragraphs, some of which include

[55]Herman, 367.
[56]Ibid.
[57]Ibid., 341.
[58]This is similar to two cases of vague narrators discussed in Clark, "Manipulating Inferences," 137–9.

all of the references to a person within that list of sentences, thereby expunging that person from the text, others of which encompass the entirety of a particular memory. This extract also recalls the act of excluding a term in section one, and in particular exercise 12 within that section, which includes the terms "CUT", "erase", "annul", "blot", "expunge" and "wound" (6). Within this extract in section five, "you" is more clearly functioning as fictionalised address, but at this juncture the referent is the son of the speaker, rather than the father. The inconsistencies in the referent of "you" within global representations of the text mean that all implicatures arising from any sections including "you" may remain particularly weak.

The second and final aspect that warrants inclusion within a relevance theoretic analysis of this text is its use of disnarration. Disnarration describes narrative techniques in which the ontological status of entities, states, acts or events as "actual" within the storyworld "is made temporarily or permanently ambiguous, or ultimately denied".[59] As has been shown, most of the multiple choice exercises in Zambra's book require the careful cognitive processing of all of the proposed answer options in relation to the question, each of which can evoke an array of implicatures. Often, the nature of the exercise requires the reader to sustain multiple, sometimes conflicting narratives (i.e., narratives in different orders, in section two, or with different elements excluded, in section four), and multiple associated inferences, in order to comparatively evaluate them in some way. This constitutes a form of "alternarration", a subtype of disnarration, in which (as described in Macrae 2019) "two or more mutually exclusive versions of an aspect of the story are presented without any indication of which, if any, is 'real' within the storyworld". In such circumstances, because "no single version is presented and legitimised as 'real', the reader is left to merely oscillate between acceptance of each, and corresponding negation of its alternative(s), without reaching a resolution".[60] For example, in section two, exercise 27, as discussed previously, the loss of a child is narrated. In answer options A and B, the dream of losing a child precedes the actual loss, thus making available the implicature that, in the storyworld, the dream was a premonition. In the other answer options, the dream follows the loss in the storyworld. Where a "narrative" is less present, as in section one, the same process of simultaneous and contrary evocations occurs with the alternative implicatures associated with each different answer option.

With regards to cognitive pragmatic processing, alternarration may involve a different but related form of "mutual parallel adjustment" (that is, different from but related to the mutual adjustment between explicatures and implicatures, and between local and global inferences, as mentioned in section two of this article). Because in most cases none of the answer options can be conclusively identified as correct, with one singular version of events construed as the accurate depiction of what really happened in the storyworld, or one set of implicatures considered markedly more relevant, instead the reader sustains all of the evoked and conflicting inferences, both while they attempt to comparatively assess inferable implicatures and select an answer, and after they have recognised the frequent logical impossibility of selecting one choice in response to the task.

The multiplicity and complexity of the alternative narratives and/or hypothesised implicatures that the reader is required to temporarily sustain when reading any one

[59]Macrae, 159; cf. McHale, 108.
[60]Macrae, 180–1; cf. McHale, 108.

exercise in this book may constitute a fairly extreme form of what, as mentioned in section two of this article, Pilkington and others refer to as "poetic effects". This may account for the effortful reading reported by some readers, as in the previously quoted Goodread reviewer comments "There are multiple layers of meaning that can be contemplated by choosing different answers" and "I was surprised by how poignant Multiple Choice was. […] The trick of this book is that you actually have to do the questions. […] by playing the author's game you can get to see how a tiny detail can shift your perception of the question. Hopefully, too, you will find out why that is important".[61] That the book receives so many positive reviews is a testament to the level of cognitive reward, in terms of positive cognitive effects, to which these processing efforts lead.

Conclusion

This article has offered an analysis of Zambra's *Multiple Choice* using relevance theory, exploring the ways in which Zambra explicitly draws the readers' inferential processes into his postmodern critique of Pinochet's regime. As quoted at this article's opening, Novey argues that the multiple choice test on Borges, taken by their niece in Chile, "is really about testing a student's ability to recognise, and comply with, the intentions of the test maker".[62] *Multiple Choice* explores and explodes the way this test format has been used to guide and restrict ways of thinking, playfully at once exploiting and subverting conventions, as part of a sardonic challenge to the oppressive ideologies such conventions can be used to uphold. Intertwined with this metafictional rebellion are related thematic strands on troubled father-son and creator-created relationships, and on the freedoms and risks of writing and different kinds of erasure. This article has surveyed readers' responses to the text, and has outlined and employed relevance theory to illustrate the workings of Zambra's complex achievement in enabling readers to attain the positive cognitive effects afforded by fully engaging with his at once humorous and sinister, slight and demanding text. Finally, this article has suggested that second-person address and disnarration are significant to the text's pragmatic processing challenges, residual ambiguities and careful balance of cognitive effort and reward.

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[61]MC-5, MC-10.
[62]Novey.

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