ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an attempt to examine language in its referential and non-referential (figurative) aspects. Whether it is a work of literature or theory, writers and readers are confronted with the problem of language in both its aspects. It is often hard to determine where word and thing connect or fail to connect, irrespective of the nature of the discourse. Moreover, every articulation is likely to be as much about something other than, outside or beyond itself. The language of communication can incorporate elements of discourse and vice-versa.

The differences and relatedness of meaning or even its materiality calls for a complex transaction between the linguistic and the metalinguistic. This dissertation aims to search for a common thematics covering structuralist-poststructuralist thinking, especially linguistic and literary pre-occupations in/of theory. It examines the convergence between literary and linguistic investigations into the nature and origin of language and meaning. The relation between what language does and what it says—precisely the relation between the word and the world—though seems transparent, is a yet unsolved problem. Where we conceive of a harmonious fusion of doing and saying, it appears an ineluctable tension that governs all verbal activity. 'Truth' is therefore affected by a determinate 'undecidability', the literal haunted by the figurative, the given, the so-called 'real' is always in some sense subject to perception or a reading—the necessary is never entirely separable from the merely possible. Instead of a totality in which any statement could find a centre of reference, knowledge is burdened with a certain 'supplementarity' that in the end remains 'unecompassable'.

However, this dissertation does not try to solve the mysteries associated with language at its point of origin. Rather, it attempts at understanding how even as we speak from seemingly exclusive positions—linguistics, philosophy, phenomenology, structuralism, deconstruction etc.—we plead for the figurative nature of language, because, every time we speak, we negotiate with figures. The dissertation therefore does not seek to contest reality, but seeks to understand how we understand reality. It contends that as we describe reality, we, in the process create a reality that is textually validated. Hence, language creates a reality that is legitimised by a textual universe, as a result of which there develops an intricate relationship

between "words" as linguistic entities and "things" as part of the discourse of the universe— one involving a process of "worlding the word".

The methodology applied is an eclectic one, in the sense that there is not any adherence to any strict disciplinary confines, rather, there is a shuttling from and to different epistemological spheres, like those of philosophy and linguistics. While there have been very interesting philosophical deliberations between philosophy and language as such, there are questions that still haunt the relationship between the philosophy of language and the language of philosophy. In other words, the relationship between the word and the ways in which it describes and 'redescribes' the world is still an area not much explored and explicated though there has been an appreciable wealth of critical responses through trajectories of philosophy, hermeneutics and linguistics.

Accordingly, the thesis places five major positions on the philosophy of language and critical theory in six writers, namely Saussure, Austin and Searle, Derrida, Lacan and Ricoeur on one template. The purpose is to show that even as we examine them as speaking from different positions, what they basically plead for is the figurative nature of language.

There lies an incompatibility between the exigency for a fixed meaning of words, essential to communication, and the contamination of meaning due to the interaction of each unit with others around it, and secondly, meaning in language operates as an aspect of social investment as well as social investiture. The social investment in language in fact halts the endless process of signification.