

INTRODUCTION

This work is concerned first, in a general way, with the ‘in-between’ nature of the fields of linguistics and literary studies. More particularly it addresses the continuous sliding of literary works into and toward linguistic paradigms, and vice versa, especially in the use of figurative language. It is a common belief amongst theorists and ordinary language users alike that one of the core uses of language is the exchange of information about the world. Irrespective of background and belief, the theorist—interested either in the meaning of words or sentences in themselves, or in the meaning of what speakers say when they use words and sentences—is engaged in the meaning of meaning and the conditions of creation of meaning. This is mainly because one reason why speakers use language is to say something about the world, to describe states of affairs or the world in words. Accordingly, considerations of truth or falsity seem to play an obvious role in describing the relation between representation and states of affairs in the world. However, for all the variety, breadth and depth of the different studies, the precise role of truth in linguistic utterances in their search for linguistic meaning is far from settled.

In other words, as soon as linguists or philosophers start to construct an account of a ‘true’ meaning, they encounter such linguistic terms that are undoubtedly meaningful, but whose meaning does not contribute in any way to the meaning and truth of the utterance. Understandably, a major preoccupation of literary theory and hermeneutics has been to offer a satisfactory theory of ‘meaning’. Critical theory, whether working with linguistics or hermeneutics, offers a complex trail of announcements and posturing when it comes to the meaning of meaning. On the one hand, the huge corpus of arguments about the nature of texts and textuality, from the formalist approach of the New Critics to the deconstructionist theory of Jacques Derrida, does not seem to have inhibited strongly polarizing discussions of ‘what the author intended’ or ‘the meaning of the text’ in most literature courses. On the other hand, the preoccupation of literary studies with making sense of literature with a certain theoretical awareness has made it necessary that any convincing treatment of meaning be a linguistic-philosophical-epistemological-phenomenological-ontological analysis. Such an analysis is required to address the disputes and disagreements about meaning among the various formalist, structuralist, hermeneutical theories of literary art. This dissertation seeks to place Saussure, Austin, Searle, Derrida, Lacan and Ricoeur on one template and show how they work with—that is, explicate and problematize—figurations of what could be called

the word-thing relationship. In a way, it initiates an interdisciplinary dialogue between language as a linguistic domain and as a literary field.

The dissertation seeks to examine the debate on the relationship between language and the world. In so doing, it intends to examine language in its referential and non-referential (figurative) aspects. Basically the purpose is to examine certain issues concerning the way or ways in which a linguistic paradigm either structures and determines or informs a literary theory. It tries to understand how even as we speak from seemingly exclusive positions—linguistics, philosophy, phenomenology, structuralism, deconstruction, etc.—we plead for the figurative nature of language, because, each time we speak, we negotiate with figures. The dissertation also contends that as we describe reality, we, in the process create a reality that is textually validated. Finally this dissertation aims at exploring how language creates a reality that is legitimized 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. In other words, the dissertation concentrates on the exploration of points of convergence among Saussurean linguistics, speech act theory, deconstruction, psychoanalysis and hermeneutics.

The relationship between the word and the world has not only had a complex history but also a complex praxis. What Derrida calls logocentrism maps out the entire territory of disputes between the Word of God or Word as opposed to the world of humans supposedly created in response to the word of the Word. In other words, spelt with a capital W, Word allies with God and when written in lower case allies with worldly creatures that somehow make use of language but as contingent users. To put it differently, language is divided by the user. When used by God, it is claimed to be self-evident. When used by human beings, on the contrary, it is bound to underperform, that is, look for substantiation from horizontal additives or vertical additives.

For example, a saying such as “Thou shalt not speak evil” can be seen as self-evident in a context where God’s will is paramount. However, if one asks “What is evil?” the question is perfectly legitimate but the implication behind the question is not. In fact, while one may, hypothetically speaking, not know or know of evil, asking a question like that is in a way hollowing out the totality of God’s power. For, in the human world language, apart from significance requires contexts, in which to signify. One says “Home

is where the heart is” but we do not talk kindly to somebody looking for a ‘heart’ in a house he/she visits. We do so because here the heart is not a body organ but a figure. So to say that home and heart are one is a way of robbing both words of meanings already ‘given’ to them. However, one may also say that meanings are not directly axial. In fact, one may say that one’s heart is like one’s home in the sense that while the former is central to one’s life-system in a physiological sense, one’s home is central to one’s life-world. While home is not equal to heart, it is certainly equivalent in a figurative sense.

This is also where the problem lies. In human language, X therefore can never be X. X can only be somewhat like Y which is somewhat like P, which is in some ways, like X and Y, but never fully so. In fact, this problem of Word forever determining the power and range of word would have been perfectly acceptable in a theological understanding of human-God hierarchy. When we talk of human language in the human world, the reference to lapses of human language to convey a worldly sense adequately smacks of imposing the logic of theology unverifiable as it is, on human life which, invariably, gets its meaning in order through both verification and contemplation.

The title of this thesis responds intertextually, if not case by case, to debates that deal with words and things. In his book, *The Word and the World* (1990), the Indian philosopher B. K. Matilal offers a nuanced response to debates on the field with examples from Indian philosophy of names and things, case, universals, concluding with the idea of *dhvani* and *vakrokti* (sound and circumlocutions). In a crucial passage, Matilal refers to the limited nature of theories of speech in Mimamsa and Nyaya schools of philosophy. For these schools suggested “that the uttered word must be distinguished from the physical reality of the sequential utterances of letters or sounds” (83). While the thesis in itself appears logical if we explain the uttered word through the concept of sound signifier and the sequential utterances as idea-signifiers, discussions of the terminological consequences of the two reach a kind of metaphysical aporia. For instance, philosophers get increasingly drawn towards creating a hierarchy between *sphota* and *dhvani*, that is the sound that is heard and the echo or the resonance that is understood or absorbed. Indian poetics seems to arrive at a theoretical climax with *rasa-dhvani*, developed by Abhinavagupta (975-1025 A.D).

Matilal’s critique mentions Saussure and Derrida to offer a context of departure to the western reader. However in the absence of a comparative frame, types and tropes of

Western poetics do not get adequate space for a fuller assessment when mentioned or contrasted vis-a vis Indian figures of speech. It is not within the scope of this thesis to examine how Saussure addressed the word image and sound image continuum or rupture in a direct response to Panini, Patanjali and Bhartrihari. However, to think of the word and the world in a continuum, which Indian Philosophy tries to do requires a bridge between word and thing. It can be suggested in a way that some of the Western philosophers of language discussed in this thesis draw on the secular elements of Indian discourses on the word and the world. However, a question that needs to be asked is: what happens when verifiable facts such as language in print and objects in the world are judged or interpreted in the light of unverifiable registers such as god's will or God's word. While this thesis does not directly deal with this particular aspect of the Word-word disconnect, it is alive to the consequences of the rupture when we look at the relationship between word and thing or words and things.

It would not be out of context here to refer to Frederic Jameson's provocatively titled book, *The Prison- House of Language* (1972). Even as Jameson says that he offers a critical account of structuralism and Russian Formalism in this book, his freewheeling discussion of structures of language in relation to structures of society allows him to look at language through dialectical perspective. So he says, echoing Hegel:

Thus language perception follows in its operation the Hegelian law that determination is negation; but it is perhaps Sartre's distinction between internal and external negation which makes its specificity clearest. External negation obtains in analytical thought, and in the world of physical objects juxtaposed side by side. Thus, to say that a table is not a giraffe is to say something true, but non-essential, which affects neither the being of the table nor that of the giraffe, which in other words does not really contribute to the definition of either. But human reality is governed by the internal negation; so that the fact that I am not an engineer, or a Chinese, or a sixty-year-old, says something that touches me profoundly in my very being. So with language: each sound stands in a relationship of internal negation to the other elements of its system. (34)

He further opines that:

The movement of Saussure's thought may perhaps be articulated as follows: language is not an object, not a substance, but rather a value: thus language is a perception of identity ... thus every linguistic perception holds in its mind at the same time an awareness of its opposite. (35)

Thus, by thinking the words "fish" and "sheep" rapidly over, first in the singular and then in the plural, the mind can be felt instinctively to work up a feeling of opposition where is physically or materially present . . . (35)

Jameson sees language as a perception not just of an object as a substance. Interestingly, he cites the Saussurean idea of value. Jameson says that language is clearly a perception of identity. However, the perception of identity is simultaneously the perception of difference. In other words, "Every linguistic perception holds in its point at the same time an awareness of its own opposite" (35). To the extent that 'fish' and 'sheep' and 'snake' refer to objects outside the arena of words, almost hinting at a kind of self-presence, also exhibit a sure sign of permanent absence of the objects from the world of words. Having said that, worlds never tire of constituting words much the same way as words never tire of constituting worlds. For example, even as we suspect the veracity of worlds created by words, we still do not stop using words.

In a peculiar way, this investment in language as a mode of communication reflects social hierarchy and language rules. For it is possible that language and meaning operate in complicity with power. In other words, the belief that some meanings are universal where some others are not does not stand up to scrutiny. It is also historically evident that words trim down some of their polyglossy when put to use in a definitive social format or a notified social register.

Linguistic communities do play an important role in letting words retain certain implications and erase certain others. Viewed holistically therefore, meaning is neither universally valid nor universally validated. In fact the validation of meaning in a given social situation is a social investment. The difference between anarchy and polysemy would be hardly seen in a Tower of Babel situation where every user speaks a language of his or her own which, in effect means that every user looks for a meaning that is valid in an object context, not valid in the arena. So if meaning is to be made available for a

common structure to be at work, the Tower of Babel situation must be addressed differently. In other words, linguistic anarchy is social anarchy co-terminous. Conversely linguistic discipline and social discipline are also co-terminous. To the extent that language and language-users are supposed to operate to communicate already makes language complicit in a process of social engineering. To put it differently, we can say that while defining the link between word and meaning, that is, in restoring a word to its supposed thingness, all linguistic communities resort to a process of hierarchisation of available meanings.

Language use is made possible only when the user chooses a particular layer in the hierarchy and then decides to make available, on the horizontal plane, something drawn from the hierarchical. In effect, the claim that some meanings are universal means that these meanings are complicit with social investments in power. If a labourer says a certain word from his home community and invites his friends to a drink, his utterance would be met with indifference or even derision. On the other hand, if the President of a powerful country uses a word spoken by only a handful of his people, the word gets globalised. The effect of globalization would be felt the world over, creating newer hierarchies.

In language use, what is important is not just who uses it, but also who sanctions the use. Saussure, Austin and Searle, Derrida, Lacan and Ricoeur examine the various facets of the links between what is on the one hand considered universal meaning as opposed to what is irregular or unusual meaning. This unusual meaning disrupts the normal horizontal linking between word and thing by invoking hitherto unused vertical linkages which may not have been available or tried by anyone except a particular individual seeking to use it for the first time.

The result is a figure, a displacement, a scar, a wound, a rupture, not necessarily an elaboration or an elongation. The figure challenges the consolidation of what could be called the social hierarchy of language. Whether it is Saussure on the sign or Derrida on the supplement, the common thread in framing and understanding meaning lies in the figure of the figure. This thesis threads this common feature by consistently focusing on the figure as a sign of deviation, not in terms of abnormality but as a mode of challenge to a social code. It is not so much about linguistic deviance or disruption as about challenges to linguistic hierarchy.

There has been a great deal of interest in matters involving linguistics and the philosophy of language. As an obvious result, there has been a tremendous proliferation of debates on the relationship between word and thing, in linguistics as well as literature. These debates include paradigms that can be theoretically justified. They also offer new explications or interpretive models and reevaluations of structuralist and post-structuralist positions on the nature of language, especially its figurative content and nature. It is interesting to note that critical works on linguistics and literary theory have mostly focused on the nature of language as reflected in literary theory. Thus, for instance, critics like Jonathan Culler (1975), Roger Fowler (1986), David Robey (1973), John Sturrock (2003), concentrate either on the Saussurean dichotomies like langue/parole, signifier/signified, synchrony/diachrony or on the application of structuralist principles in literary analysis. On the other hand, critics of Austin and Searle like Stanley Cavell (1976), Katz (1977), Marie Louise Pratt (1977), Sandy Petry (1990), Barry Smith (2003), have offered polarized stances on the performative/constative attributes of language. Commentators on Derrida's work such as Gayatri C. Spivak (1976), J. Hillis Miller (1991), Geoffrey Hartman (1981), Abrams (1989), Culler (1982), Gasche (1994), Nicholas Royle (1995), Caputo (1997), Geoffrey Bennington (2000), return to the claims of deconstruction and the philosophical trajectories it creates in explaining how language and meaning relate 'negativistically'. Similarly, Anthony Wilden (1956), Soshana Felman (1983), Helene Cixous (1973), Malcolm Bowie (1989), Alan Sheridan (1981), Sean Homer (2005), Bruce Fink (2005), translators and scholars of Lacan focus on the nature and role of subjectivity in Lacan's readings of Freud and Saussure. Though they have referred to contradictions in his comments on the Saussurean dichotomy between the signifier and the signified, there is no attempt to map Lacan's comments on the subject. Again, critics like David Kaplan (2008), Richard Kearney (2004), and Pirovolakis (2010), comment on Ricoeur's ideas on the exercise of interpretation and the 'conflicts' it generates, but more from a Freudian perspective.

Yet what is a matter of interest with regard to the present work is that despite the volume of material either promoting or denigrating various linguistic approaches to literature, certain vagueness continues to characterize discussion of the linguistic models involved. In other words, this is to say that in some cases problems surrounding the basic terms of the arguments are never addressed. It is clear that we do not have exclusive studies on the relationship between the word and the world as expounded and debated by

the philosophers included in this dissertation. This generates a critical space where one can attempt a bridge between literary and linguistic approaches to the word-world relationship.

The dissertation has five chapters, along with an introduction and a conclusion. The methodology applied is an eclectic one, in the sense that there is no adherence to any strict disciplinary confines; rather, there is a shuttling from and to different epistemological spheres, like those of philosophy and linguistics.

Chapter 1, titled, “Ferdinand de Saussure: Beginnings,” is a study of the word-thing relationship as expounded in Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* (1983). Saussure’s ideas hinge upon a few key concepts—*langue* (and the synchronic approach to linguistics it reflects), the dual nature of the sign, and value—all of which seem to contribute to judging and problematizing the ‘distance’ between the word and the thing. 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. Two fundamental and contradictory consequences may be drawn from this: first, the “concrete”, “positive” entity of language—the sign as a binary opposition of signifier and signified—appears as the effect of only the signifier, insofar as it materializes and realizes the operation of difference. Second, it is precisely the materiality and realization of the signifier that constantly elude rigorous definition or determination. Moreover, while Saussure’s *Course* provides classic assertions of logocentric positions, it also offers instances of principles that undo or subvert them. Thus closer attention to the *Course* indicates even the beginnings of certain contradictions in Saussure’s argument. Given the acknowledgement that these aspects may be inevitable in a reconstructed text, it examines the ‘confusions’ as symptoms of a ‘miscarriage’ of the Saussurean line of thinking. In view of this, the chapter aims at exploring elements of deconstruction in Saussure. Such an analysis is necessitated by the fact that Saussure’s *Course* raises interesting questions regarding logocentrism even as it seems to claim affinity to such a philosophy. The primary contention in the chapter is that meaning in language is caught up in an endless process of signification, as we understand that “in language, there are

only differences.” It also seeks to contend that since language is a social investment, it is this social aspect that interrogates and intervenes this process of signification.

Chapter 2, titled “Austin, Searle: Doing Things with Words” explores the relationship between the word and the world as explicated in Austin’s *How to do Things with Words* (1965) and Searle’s *Speech Acts* (1969). Austin suggests that the relation between the total speech situation and the related ‘action’ is based on “how words stand in respect of satisfactoriness to the events, situations etc.” (Austin 148). Thus a theory of speech acts should ideally be able to specify every feature of the context that might affect the success or failure of the speech act. However, meaning is context-bound while the total context is unmasterable both in principle and practice. Therefore, Searle, while exploring the relation between the word and the world, emphasizes the “need to distinguish between (a) talking, (b) characterizing talk, and explaining talk. . .” (Searle: 14-5). However perfectly tamed and designated by words with which we place them in our daily transactions, and subject to linguistic causality, a speech act may be with or without effect, but the striking effect all speech acts produce is that of a word meeting or displacing a thing. Two reasons may be held to account for this. First, the role of language in shaping our world is not limited to certain specific acts, because it is not possible to say with confidence exactly what it does on specific occasions. Its broader effects have to be examined as it organizes our encounters with the world. Second, so far the relation between social conventions—the constitutive conventions that make possible social life—and individual acts is concerned, the former is not merely the background against which, we decide how to act. Rather, this relation between social conventions and individual acts brings forth an account of the complexities of norm and action.

Chapter 3, titled “Jacques Derrida: Figures and Fallibilism” examines, first, Derrida’s treatment of language and meaning as explicated in *Of Grammatology* (1976) and, second, the locus of Derrida’s objections to the Saussurean paradigm and to linguistic study in general. A study of the nature of language and the source and nature of meaning only asserts the impossibility of determinate authoritative meaning—any meaning or identity is an ideality that denies the constant motion of signs and secondly, not only is meaning indeterminate because of the nature of language, but the nature of language itself is indeterminate. This chapter contends that metaphoricity is the only way through/in which language can pass from one existing thing or meaning to another. Metaphor being the force of displacement or deferral of meanings, that which enables us

to associate one thing with another, is the way we deal with differences between things and also study the gap between the word and the thing. The interpretive activity therefore always leads towards the poetic and metaphorical status of language, because, there is no way we can fix meanings absolutely or find completely stable structures to contextualize them in a deterministic manner.

Chapter 4, titled “Jacques Lacan: Figures and Facticity” is devoted essentially to an exposition of the Lacanian conceptions of language and their application in psychoanalysis through a study of *Ecrits* (2006) — it examines how Lacan explores the relationship between the mechanism of psychoanalysis and the mechanism of metaphor-making. It studies Lacan’s premises regarding sign and subject, the crucial importance of language to the analytical process, and the interrelations of the Saussurean notions of signification which Lacan assimilates to his own notions of human subjectivity. Whatever be the modalities of the body and of affectivity, their expression and resumption always passes through language because they are always inscribed in its semantic networks and its metaphorical and metonymic structures. The ‘selfhood’ of man gets projected by the ‘speaking’ of the significations inscribed in his unconscious. In other words, using/understanding language is premised on the exploitation of a distance between word and thing, word and word, and possibly word and event. To speak therefore, is essentially to misread the language of language itself. For, to speak also means to imagine the possibility of (a) communicating, (b) explaining/explicating with/without audience and (c) engaging in language speaking to language or language speaking about language. Hence, human knowledge and understanding cannot avoid the dichotomy of the Lacanian algorithm—S/s, because there is always bound to be a gap between the spoken/written text and its referential base, even the text and the very material that constitutes it as a text. Thus, we constantly generate other texts as users of a language. So interpretation is intertextual, a relation of texts to texts. Hence the activity of interpretation is always dependent on an imagined—mirror stage—identity of one text with another text. This study uses Freudian theories of displacement, condensation and sublimation to show an essential link between word and thing that can be traced back to the process of substitution suggested by Freud.

Chapter 5, titled “Paul Ricoeur: Figures and Phenomena” explores the claims of Ricoeur regarding the multiplicities of interpretation, as evident in his text, *The Rule of Metaphor* (2003). Ricoeur suggests that the surface meaning has little to do with the meaning

offered by metaphor and that recovered by the reader. This chapter studies the disjunction between signifier and signified, between what is said and what is meant, between the literal and the symbolic. Ricoeur suggests that “Metaphor is metaphorically stated. . . The theory of metaphor turns in a circular manner to the metaphor of theory” (*Rule* 339). For Ricoeur, metaphors are not built upon the associations of single words with referents, but rather metaphors are an intrinsic creation of the inherent tension between a literal and figurative meaning. He therefore questions: “Must not we conclude then that metaphor implies a tensive use of language in order to uphold a tensive concept of reality?” (*Interpretation* 68). In line with Derrida, Ricoeur contends that the critical moment of interpretation does not follow from the phenomenological bracketing of external referents so that the internal structure can be examined. On the contrary, inside and outside are merely superficial distinctions.

In Saussure’s figuration of *langue* and *parole*, there is a crucial inversion of a language universal. Although it is taken for granted that Saussure offers a thesis that was, and is, revolutionary, the violent “dating” of structuralist thought caused by Derrida—and the course of subsequent discussants who either agreed or disagreed with him—did not allow much debate on a key aspect of Saussure’s set aside by Derrida. One of the aspects that Saussure outlined but did not consider articulating explicitly is the social mapping of language. If, for instance, we accept for a moment that *langue* is indeed a possible result of *parole* (Wolfreys, *Key* 140), we can then see that the system of signs that allows for particular instances to be seen as valid or otherwise is not so much a condition as a consequence of instances. Now if we translate condition as rule or ground, and instance as praxis, the importance of particular usages—elsewhere called utterance—in constituting the rule cannot be ignored. In other words, even in Saussurean formulations, language is best seen as a social formation or a social instance, where “combinatorial” practices result in “combinatorial” rules. Conversely, an individual utterance that may be ancillary or accidental in a social system is not to be seen as a dispensable practice or instance but as a constituent of the rule book.

Therefore, this reading seeks to reiterate a common line of argument amongst the philosophers discussed in the five chapters. And that common thread is the multiplicity of meaning and an indefinite relation between the word and the world. It is also that at the limit of language and its ambiguities stands the relation of the word to the thing. Meaning thus functions as the universal mediation between the subject and the world.

Besides, as language intends to mean nothing, it always means more than any particular writer or thinker and judges any understanding or interpretation to be premature closures of the play of differences. Therefore since human users have no place “in” language, intention, meaning to say and validity of interpretation are “outside” of it. Consequently, language, not the users, is the final authority on meaning. On the other hand, meaning can never coincide with its object at a point of pure, unobstructed union. Language invariably intervenes to deflect, defer or differentially complicate the relation between manifest sense and expressive intent. Hence, the search for an absolute word for a thing is always on—there is bound to be an inadequacy or lack of co-ordination that characterizes our drive to make words into things. We have not lost meaning, but meaning has lost its claims to absoluteness. Having said that the loss of the irrecoverable status of meaning does not stop the user from looking for meaning, as if the use of language in itself was a recovery or a restoration of the lost status of meaning. This dissertation maps out the implications of this loss-recovery continuum in twentieth century critical theory.