

ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES IN AN ERA OF HIGH TECHNOLOGY AND CYBERCULTURE

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Being a Keynote Address Presented at the 1st International Conference on the theme: “English and Literary Studies in an Era of High Technology and Cyberculture” Held at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Federal University, Dutsin-Ma, Katsina State from 26th to 29th January, 2026

Introduction

It is a privilege as well as a public acknowledgement of indebtedness to present this Keynote Address at the 1st *International Conference on English and Literary Studies in an Era of High Technology and Cyberculture* hosted by the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Federal University, Dutsin-Ma (FUDMA). As an inspiring International Convocation of Scholars, Researchers and Students of English and Literary Studies, the Conference provides an ample opportunity for the meticulously assessment of the location of the Humanities in general and English and Literary Studies in particular within a World Order circumscribed by the scientific and entrepreneurial spirit of the 21st Century, the oeuvre of technological innovation and the ICT-driven mien of cybernetics. I therefore highly admire and appreciate the courage, endorsement and support offered to this prestigious gathering by of the Chief Host and Vice Chancellor of this upcoming University, Professor M. K. Othman. In the same breadth, I salute the initiative and participation of the Host and Dean, Faculty of Arts, Professor Bashir Sallau and the Convener and Head, Department of English, Dr. Christopher E. Nwabudike.

It is plausible that the Conference's concern with English partly emanates from its status not only as the mother tongue of such multicultural groups of 'native speakers' as the British, Americans, and Australians but also out of the efficacious global spread of British imperial interests since the 15th Century and their role in propelling the modernization process. Consequently, English has become an eminent Global Language, a means of disseminating knowledge in any field throughout the world as well as source of intercultural communication. Despite its high status as a template of multilingualism and multiculturalism, English Language falls within the epistemic jurisdiction of Linguistics, and for this reason, I crave the indulgence of this eminent gathering to bury it under the core objects of this event: *Linguistics and Literary Studies*. The centrality of the Era of High Technology to the themes of this Conference implies that in conceptual terms, it is concerned with the 'Language-Literature-Society dynamics or indeed the impact of change on fields of study. I therefore proceed on the conviction that for Scholars in the Human Sciences, the focus on the bond between change and learning is fundamentally contextual and thus an apt starting point of navigating the underlining issues of the Conference.

Contextual, Conceptual and Epistemic Paradigms of Linguistics and Literary Studies

In choosing its Main and Sub themes and locating them within the impact of social and technological transformation, this Conference has opened a discourse on Epistemology and its historical value. For Linguistics and Literary studies are integral element of the Humanities and their preoccupation with man, nature and society has placed them within the tense relation between power, governance and social cohesion. As evident in discourses over knowledge, learning the appropriate organization of society in the epochal Classical, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Neoclassical and Enlightenment eras (4 BC to 19th Century AD), epistemological pressures often emanated from aligning

learning, knowledge and scholarship with statecraft and social development. In each of the aforementioned landmark periods, the Humanities constituted themselves as discourses, critiques and knowledge forms and this trend has assumed a much complex dimension under the Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment as briefly sketched out below to show why tension and freedom of enquiry are inherent attributes of the relation between the Human Sciences

Power and ‘Nation building’.

The ontological essence and ideological value of the Humanities are important because it is from their quiddity that epistemic fields respond to the monumental historical changes. In essence, the *Humanities*, (*studia humanitatis*) derive their authenticity from the notion that Man is inherently good, his situation could be changed or improved upon through education, and the human species is central in the order of nature. In this context, the Humanities encompass a group of disciplines that are concerned with human beings, their ideas, actions, and relationships. Philosophically, the Humanities which assumed prominence in 19th Century Europe due to the decline of religious belief and the corresponding reliance on science and technology as the panacea to all problems facing humanity are sustained by anthropocentric ontology, anthropological epistemology, and secular rationalism based on the assumption that happiness and fulfilment can be achieved solely through man’s capabilities and action. As *classicus* of experience and source of knowledge, the Humanities and their pundits from Erasmus to Jean-Paul Sartre, have argued that human beings have special attributes and capacities that make their motivations, actions, social structures not amenable to the objective and empirical analyses of science. In this respect, the Humanities rose in opposition to the dogmatism of science and the idealism of the

Enlightenment positivism and this opprobrium has become an enduring quality of the Humanities.

The disruption of the humanist mien of the Human Sciences was disrupted by the emergence of the New World Order, and this severance has tremendous implications for knowledge production. The triumph of Corporate Capitalism and the consequent emergence of an America-led Neo-liberal Empire since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, has transformed global affairs through monumental changes, including the termination of the bipolar global system and its replacement with what Cliffe and Seddon in “Africa in a New World Order” published in *Review of African Political Economy* (No. 50: 1991) described as a “tri-lateral structure to the world capitalist system – US, Japan, EU – each with its own special interests and special relationships in specific parts of the ‘Third World’ to protect and defend... fraught with heightened potential for conflict” (7). In the last 25 years, this ‘new order’ has imposed its hegemony through: the infusion of hyper-development of technology, Automation, Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, and cybernetics into the system of production; the inauguration of the consumer, knowledge-based gig-economy in which skilled persons can perform different jobs; the incorporation of territories worldwide into the Private Sector regulated, profit-driven market system of exchange and transaction through globalization; the commodification of utilities and services; and the centralization of money and banking in regulating national and international trade relations under the dictate of IMF, World Bank and World Trade Organization.

In the era of heightened economic activities and the hyper-flow of information across geographical boundaries where national economies function as units of the ‘World Economy’, *Education*, Jean Francois Lyotard tells us in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), knowledge production must be done in ‘accordance with the laws of commodity production’. The unfolding of the New World therefore provides the contextual, conceptual stimulus as well as

built the pressures, possibilities and challenges to contemporary knowledge production. In this regard, the centrality of 'studies' to the themes of this Conference entails the examination of the alignment between the New Era and the epistemic parameters of English and Literary Studies as communicative and mimetic subjects that produce humanistic critique of an egregious, eldritch era that encodes itself as basically instrumentalist, materialist, amoral and anti-human.

In essence, this Conference takes its premises from the assumption, *apriori*, that current Linguistic and Literary Studies are undertaken under the pressures exerted by tremendous changes, or in an epochal terrain of masochist transformation described variously as Postmodern, Post-industrial, Posthuman, Post-science or Post-truth to highlight its weight either as a rupture or an inchoate conflation of continuity and severance, a departure from and not yet a comfortable arrival at a stable, new order. As the umbrella term for this labyrinth, the 'Postmodern Condition' is emblematic of chaos in which, to paraphrase, Karl Marx, "all that is solid melts into air" and globalization, its main roadmap, has both reached its zenith and decline. Thus, defined by instability in the conceptualization of the real and in domestic and international relations, the Postmodern Condition is an era of the technological revolution, fluid national identity, inbetweenness, shifting and unstable existential terrains and swift changes in human experience of and ideas about space, time and selfhood. In this regard, postmodernity is a contradictory phenomenon that simultaneously promises progress, development, freedom and denies those things in practical terms; it is a promise and a threat to inherited human notions of cultural, psychological, and spiritual authenticity, and coherent sense of identity and sovereignty and this paradox partly explains why Marshall Berman in *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1993:15) describes it as "a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom

of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish". In short, the postmodern condition institutes the ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent.

Although postmodernity is an encompassing historico-technological phenomena, it has a specific manifestation in our part of globe as 'the Postcolonial condition' which defines the location of 'Developing Nations' in the Global South, in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as repressed postcolonial landscapes in a World Order detrimental to their real interest; and their inability to curve independent paths of development. The ensuing centre-periphery syndrome whether regarded as failed decolonization or neo-colonialism' has accentuated futile dependency, hybridity and mimicry due to the adaption of the Neoliberal Policies of Structural Adjustment, Privatization and the Market Economy. The devastating consequences of this degeneration have deepened underdevelopment, created invidious existential crises, led to the emergence of weak, Failed or Client States presided over by corrupt and affluent elite, and catastrophic decline at all levels of society. Consequently, 'Developing Nations' have become sites for the reproduction of inequality, exploitation, marginalization, and corruption with commensurate levels of instability, displacement and violence. In general, there important subheads under which this address examines the relationship between pedagogy, epistemology and the modernization process, including such crucial pillars as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Humans, the Postmodern and Postcolonial contexts of Linguistics, Literary Practice and Criticism as outlined in the following pages.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In spite its marvelousness and global penetration, *Artificial Intelligence* (AI) is not a totally new phenomenon, although it is an outcome of the development of computers after the Second World War and the prescription of the researchers gathered to explore the

invention of ‘thinking machines’ at the 1956 Dartmouth Conference in the UK. According to Andresen (2002), the term *Artificial Intelligence* itself was coined by John McCarthy in 1956 to define “the science and engineering of making intelligent machines” and as such it is an arm of Computer Science that molds computers to mimic human behaviour and facilitate the use of science and technology for the massive production of high-quality goods and services. Artificial Intelligence thus deals with the study and design of intelligent agents with the capacity to understand and relate to their environment and act with maximum chances of success. As Haton (2006:10) describes it, *Artificial Intelligence* is ‘a computing concept that enables machines to think and solve complex problems’ in similar ways that human beings do. This implies that AI operates by learning from mistakes or experience in a self-correcting manner, and this ability enables machines to effectively and continuously solve problems.

According to Raju (2024), Artificial Intelligence encompasses a diverse range of technologies and methodologies that enhance the capabilities of machines such as Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI) which excels in specific tasks, Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) which emulates human cognitive abilities, and the theoretical Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI). These enablers have such components as: Machine Learning (ML) which allows systems to improve through data; Neural Networks which was inspired by and imitate the human brain’s capacity to recognize patterns in data; Natural Language Processing (NLP) that enables machines to understand and respond to human language; Computer Vision that facilitates the interpretation of visual data; Robotics which integrates AI for autonomous task execution; Expert Systems that emulate human decision-making capacity; Reinforcement Learning which involves agents learning to maximize rewards through interactions; Deep Learning, a subset of ML that employs complex neural networks, excelling in tasks that require

processing vast amounts of data such as image and speech recognition. Invariably, AI aims at replicating human cognitive abilities such as reasoning, perception, and decision-making in machine learning, neural networks, and natural language processing techniques. Artificial Intelligence can be broadly classified into capacity-based, function-based and technology-based categories each with its varieties, focus outcomes. Ai also has 'platforms' or software frameworks that provide developers with tools and resources to build, streamline, and deploy intelligent/smart AI models and applications such as Microsoft Azure Machine Learning Studio, TensorFlow, Azure OpenAI, Google Vertex AI, Google Cloud AI Platform, Amazon SageMaker, IBM Watson Studio, IBM Watson Machine Learning, PyTorch, Data Robot, Amazon Augmented AI, and ChatGPT.

Virtual Humans, Multimedia and Self-imaging

Digital Humanities, Multimodality and Cybernetics have inaugurated the practice of replicating human experiences through 'Virtual humans' or 'supplementary people' in movies, documentaries and video games. This practice has been examined from diverse perspectives in many sources including a compendium of Essays compiled by Nadia Magnenat-Thalmann and Daniel Thalmann titled: *Handbook of Virtual Humans* (2004). As the subject of research in Networked Virtual Environments, since the 1990s, the innovative digitalization of activities of the material world or 'Virtual Human Simulations' traces the shift from the use of simple embodiments (avatars) to real-time animation and interaction in which virtual humans look, talk, and act like humans ((p. 7). In this regard, the epistemic value of virtual humans and their numerous applications is the simulation of Virtual Societies inhabited by Human Replicas who, as tropes, co-operate, make friends, communicate, come together or break up on the basis of their likes, moods, emotions, goals, fears since as simulants of human beings they have 'natural needs' like hunger, fatigue, and desire which guide the choices and behaviour. In this

context, Virtual Humans “have to act in accordance with their surrounding environment, be able to react to its changes [and] should behave like real humans [and have] abilities such as perception, language understanding...emotions, goal-driven behaviour...memory, inference, appearance of thought and personalities, interpersonal interactions, [and] social skills (1, 2, 3).

The viability of the real-virtual human-hyper-real continuum is defined by series of correlations in which technology, culture and cognition are bonded by simulation and for which purpose, the virtual human is endowed with attributes that link the cyber space with the real world, including: High-level behaviour which enhances decision-making, intelligence, motivation, and social behaviour; Perception through the synergy of virtual sensors (for Virtual Worlds) and real sensors (for Real Worlds); Animation that entails flexible motion control; and Graphics with realistic aspects including skin, hair, and clothes (p. 2). In the context of these attributes, Virtual humans are produced by Ergonomic analysis that approximate text and concept, their creation is based on the attempt of computer graphic simulation to mimic human behaviours, emotions and interaction.

Cyberculture, Language, Technology and Digital Humanities

In the era of high technology, Linguistics and Literary Studies in English or in fact any Language are fundamentally circumscribed by the permeation of Cyberculture, Multimodality and Digital Humanities as practical, conceptual, methodological and analytical templates of knowledge production. Kirschenbaum (2010:3) tells us that the term *cyberculture* came into use in 2005 after the amalgamation of the Association for Computers in the Humanities with the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing into the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations, (ADHO) and the consequent production of Blackwell's *Companion to Digital Humanities*. This development

compelled Scholars in the Humanities to develop the tools for apprehending digital materials and new modes of expression through electronic and multimedia modes. The dawn of the twenty-first century witnessed the sweeping rise of new technologies that incorporated digital tools and as the primary modes of communication and cultural transmission as Bennis (2024) implies, this development entails the assessment of the intersection of cyber culture, language, and technology, as a triad that has 'irreversibly altered the trajectory of human interaction'. Cyberculture is not just a subset of modern life but a "set of technologies, practices, attitudes, and modes of thought" that develop alongside the growth of cyberspace that represents a "network of embedded practices and representations" that shapes social life (Lévy, 1997, as cited in Fodil, 2008, p. 30).

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is central to cyberculture because it inserts a practical art or mechanical device created by human skill to meet specific needs and in the digital age, these tools have created "de-territorialized" or "de-spatialized" spaces known as cyberspace defined as "globally networked, computer-sustained, computer-accessed, and computer-generated virtual reality" where objects are made out of 'pure information. In the permeation of cyberculture and space, Language serves as the mediator between the technologically-induced virtual world and human perception through a new variety of language labelled Cyber-English, Netspeak, or even Spwritng which blends speech and writing as well as combines oral spontaneity with the permanence of written text. The steady evolution of the technology compels language to adapt by inventing a "cyberl@nguage" that allows for a planet-wide gallery of exchanges (Cotoc, ((Fodil, 2008, p. 53; Cotoc, 2017, p. 26).2017). In spite of the novelty of cybernetics, its historical underpin illustrates that that technology has always been a catalyst for restructuring human thought as evident in the first technological intrusion into the human world through the invention of writing by the Sumerians roughly five thousand years ago as Fodil (2008) avers. This is important because

writing functioned as a technology that "restructured thought" by separating the known from the knower, allowing for objectivity and the material representation of inner mental processes on external surfaces. A subsequent climax in this cognitive adventure was the invention of the Gutenberg printing press in 1450 which standardized language, imposed specific editorial constraints, and fostered the belief in a "universal objective truth" through the wide dissemination of standardized texts like the Bible. This period corresponded with Modernity, an era defined by human reason and a rejection of tradition.

While the mid-twentieth century witnessed the invention of the computer and the development of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), the shift from Modernity to Postmodernity and eventually Hypermodernity is characterized by the explosion of "hyper-structures" like hyper-consumption and hypertextuality. Stewart Brand, a pivotal figure in the 1960s counterculture, linked the hippie ethos of "access to tools" with the emerging computer revolution, coining the phrase "Ready or not, computers are coming to the people" in 1972 (Worden, 2012). This "digital utopianism" helped redefine the computer from an instrument of state control to a tool for individual liberation (Fodil, 2008; (Bennis, 2024, p. 38).

There are many conceptual and methodological issues in the rise of cybernetics that have bearing on Linguistics and Literary Studies, and this implies that the study of language use within cyberculture requires transcending the boundaries of traditional structuralist models. Although Ferdinand de Saussure's dyadic (binary) theory of the sign (signifier/signified) provided the basis for modern linguistics, it cannot fully account for the dynamic, fluid nature of the electronic sign but this gap has now been filled by Sanders Peirce's Triadic Theory of the Sign. Peirce's model involves three constituents: the Object, the Sign (Representamen), and the Interpretant and the triadic cooperation

that this bond creates allows for an unending process of semiosis, where a sign stands for something else (its object) to a mind that interprets it. In this regard, Peirce identifies the following three modes of being: Firstness (potentiality/quality), Secondness (actual existence/fact), and Thirdness (laws/norms/habits) with Firstness representing the unlimited potentialities of the Internet, Secondness the actual Jargon File or digital exchanges, and Thirdness the linguistic and cultural rules (Netiquette) that mediate between them. There is also a revolutionary linguistic tenet in cyberculture called the Triple Articulation of Language in which in addition to phonemes (minimal contrastive units) and monemes (meaningful units), the digital age has introduced MICUs (Minimal Informational Cooperative Units) which according to Fodil (2008) are linguistic units—often initials—that combine to form componemes (complex hyperwords). Furthermore cyberculture is defined by Network Thinking which involves associations rather than linear progression that mirror how the human brain functions. The core traits of this hypermodern communication are Fragmentation, Immediacy, and Hybridity with the first referring to the breaking down of traditional text units, the second to the capacity to transmit information at light speed, and the third connoting merging of disparate elements like text, image, and sound into a single unit (Berners-Lee, 2000, as cited in Fodil, 2008, p. 676) .

Linguistics and Postmodernity

It is plausible to assume that the insertion of English or broadly Linguistics as a core epistemic subject of this conference, takes cognizance of the reality that in the multicultural context of the modern world, language is a template for multifaceted socio-economic, political, cultural, personal and group interaction, self-projection, and knowledge formation. The communication, acculturation and interaction across national, ethno-linguistic, religious boundaries or the globalization of the domains of interaction entails the universalization of human language through the automation of simultaneous multi-

lingual dialogue, translation and the deployment of semiotic and graphic signs through ICT. This process privileges the parity of languages while the postmodern context of the place of language discourses, representational forms and the multimedia exerts tremendous pressure on Linguistics. This is very significant for English because of its prestige as a World Language which virtually serves as template for other contexts of language use. In the multicultural, multimodal and interdisciplinary contexts of postmodernity, language overrides individual and even collective agency since human, natural and technology intermediaries are inserted in the communication process. As Fowler (1981) argues, the specificity of the realms of language or writing has been ruptured by their commonality as sign systems, the relativity of expression and intrusion of other, technologically driven, often graphic and mimetic forms of representation. This form expansion affirms the claim of Laird (1999) all sign-systems, are not dissimilar, whatever the “realities” that are supposed to lie behind them. It is thus important for the Study of Language in general and English as the metalanguage of the modernization process to explore the changing contexts of language and its uses beyond the concerns of conventional Linguistics and all branches of language studies with the nature, function, structure, and elements within language specifically seen as grammar, semantics and inscription or orthography in words, utterances and texts, vital as they are and will remain. This because Postmodernity, Globalization and High Technology have not only universalized and facilitated steady human interaction globally but also invented non-linguistic markers of communication like graphics, emojis, emoticons, animated GIF, insignia, alpha-numerals, and pantomime which have not been analytical elements in conventional Linguistics as mood, texts, frequency have been. It is therefore vital for Linguists to take a cue from the seminal intervention of the Swiss Linguist, Ferdinand De Saussure,

in which he repudiated the narrow, inward-looking nature of Historical Linguistics. As posthumously compiled from his Lectures and published by his colleagues and students in the 1930s, *Course in General Linguistics* encapsulates Saussure's broad conception of 'structure' and its location within the philosophic doctrine of the 'conceptual map' in which things in material space and time (signs), referents/language (signifiers), and meaning/culture (signifieds) deny language self-referentiality and instead locate it as an element within the communication-meaning-making chain or system. In relation to this formulation, the basic function of Linguistics that Saussure outlines is the investigation of the underlying conventions, system, or rules by which a sign (a word) conveys meaning. This is because Language is a sign-based system in which *the sign* and its constituent elements - *the signifier* (form) and *the signified* (mental concept or idea) - function as core meaning-making units and this implies that meaning emanates from the basic *difference* between the signifier and the signified. On this basis, Saussure concludes that: *in language there are only differences without positive term*, thus emphasizing that 'difference' drives the communication chain.

Saussure in essence inaugurated a system of studying language in relation to the material world, sign system and culture which in linguistic terms explicated the structural nature of Language by repudiating the diachronic view of language as mimetic. In poststructuralist sense, this established the identity of language as entity, a system with its own rules defined sandwiched between the bond between *langue* (rules) and *parole* (utterances). However, the concern with whether language is solely a means of communication, a cognitive instrument of the mind, an axiom of human experience and interaction or a medium of interpersonal relations opened disquisitions about the function of Language as evident in the works of Austin, Searle, Halliday and Chomsky. These concerns were related to non-verbal communication as foregrounded by Harrison and Knapp. These examples illustrate that it is the fundamental responsibility of Linguists

to relate Linguistics to the changing character of social formations and for our current convocation, the Study of English or any other dominant language should take cognizance of the intrusion of cybernetics, postmodernity, multiculturalism into existential and communication spaces chains and especially incorporate interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary approaches into the trade. This because Linguistic studies have gone beyond the micro levels that encompass phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics and discourse analysis by extending their tentacles to such adjacent fields as psychology, geography, neuroscience, medicine and computer science. In this regard, this Conference should explore how to invent and integrate additional analytical markers or instruments from Neighbouring epistemologies. The expansion of Linguistics into various epistemological spaces or fields necessitates the exploration of how different epistemic fields rely on Language and Linguistics for their self-projection and this privileging of the linguistic mien not only illustrates the postmodern dictum that 'Languages structures the world' but also highlights the encroachment of *Metalinguistics* as a 'higher of grand episteme' for other fields which it treats as instances of language use beyond 'the registers' or invents for them 'new brands' of Linguistics.

Linguists should pay attention to the epistemic implications of the birth of or 'new development' about additional branches of Linguistics including: *Psycholinguistics* (the study of language in relation to the mind); *Neurolinguistics* (the study of relationship between language and the brain); *Aphasiology* (the examination of how lesions or defects in any organs of language production, perception and understanding affect competence in language while Aphasiological studies investigate how language disorders lead to such communication disorders as *amusia*, *hemiacalcalia*, *anomia* - stammering and stuttering); *Peace Linguistics* (the study of the role of language in peace-building);

Clinical linguistics (which extracts insights from linguistics, neuroscience, medicine and psychology); *Edolinguistics* (the examination of how language develops in children); *Computational linguistics* (the study of the use of linguistic knowledge especially from morphology and syntax in language programming) *Statistical linguistics* (the study of how linguistic data is subjected to statistical analysis); *Mathematical linguistics* (the investigation of how language is subjected to numerical analysis) and *Ethnolinguistics* (which examines cultural context determines language use by paying attention to how culture determines both semantic and pragmatic usages of linguistic signifiers); *Corpus linguistics* (which allows for the application of linguistic insights to assess large corpora to reveal the frequencies of linguistic elements in a Corpus); and *Spiritual linguistics* (which studies language in spiritual contexts, examines it's construction of celestial realities and how they shape people's minds).

These thriving domains in which language is the cause and effect of divergent discourses open up the space for Linguistic to evaluate how language is a mediator, instigator, and mender or explore in ideological terms where in the language-society-power scheme language is a culprit and how speech and language problems could be resolved by the instrumentality of multi/inter/trans disciplinary approaches. In this way, Metalinguistics not only addresses problems of language use but also challenges the theorization of Language as system whose veracity relies on the effective operations of all its constituent parts. Yet it is possible, for instance, that in cases of speech disorder language remains intact and vice versa. This perspective thus cast doubts on some earlier claims by Linguists about the nature and function of language. The drift is also evident in *Cognitive linguistics* which treats the language issue from a conceptual structure known as schema which Langacker describes as 'abstract template reinforced by experience' for which reason Cognitive Linguists regard grammar as both pragmatically and morphologically dependent on the cognitive structures of language users.

Digital Humanities

In addition to the phenomenal rise of cyberculture, the intense interaction between the Humanities and technological changes inspired the coinage of ‘digital humanities’ as the referent to the epistemic trends, operation, understanding and study in the Humanities in the era of computer-mediated high-technology. Approached in this way, according to Neilson et al. (2018: 8), the “digital” in Digital Humanities can ‘refer to a tool, an object of study, a medium for presenting scholarly and aesthetic productions, a mode of communication and collaboration, a sphere of economic exchange and exploitation, and a site for activist and political intervention’. This position describes an epistemic challenge in which Traditional Humanities must align its central concern with man, nature, power, and society with the revolution in high-technology by making the ‘Digital Space’ a core component of its areas of study despite their divergent fields and varieties of approaches. This admixture of problematics and procedures showcase the interdisciplinary character of research in ‘Digital Humanities’ as well classification into: *Analytical Methods* that involve computational approaches for processing large amounts of data, especially textual data; *Ethnographic Methods* that focuses on interactive, interpersonal, and social-scientific research using digital tools; *Representational Methods* that treat digital media as a mode of representation and expression; and *Archival Methods* that focus on improving historical media preservation using digital tools. These methodological issues highlight the need for ‘interdisciplinary studies’ and ‘physical information infrastructure’ that enable the mapping the boundaries of and epistemic procedures for Digital Humanities.

The alignment of ‘Traditional’ with ‘Digital Humanities’ and ‘Cyberculture’ implies that the areas of coverage are multifaceted in practice and methods and this nebulousness makes Digital Humanities

a conflation of scholarly activities conditioned by the bond between digital technology and divergent fields such as Information Science, New Media, and Software Studies. In this sense, Digital Humanities can be described as new and computerized ways of conducting scholarship that blend digital tools and methods for studies in Humanities and the fusion of investigative with analytical apparatuses frames scholars within a conceptual and practical structure described as ‘cyberinfrastructure’ by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) in its 2006 report titled: *Our Cultural Commonwealth* or “as a way of provoking reflection on the proximate and future needs of scholars for hardware, software, services, and leadership designed to allow us to make best use of information technology in works in the humanities”. The structural, epistemic and practical dimensions of Digital Humanities institute multifaceted intellectual activities which integrate cyber, linguistic, literary and textual practices into ‘digital multimodality’.

The synchronization or multimodal linguistic-literary-textual practice locates them within the attempts of the hyper-industrial, global World Order to exhibit how the digitalization of the writing/reading formations can signify the phantasmagoric character of postmodernity. It naturally follows that contemporary Linguistics and Literary Studies should apprehend the expansiveness of text-construction, form expansion, and other forms of media-mediated textual practices regulated by the digital revolution. This is important because the hegemony of Information and Computer and Technology and its diffusion through technical possibility and access or subordination and incorporation require the expansion of the concepts, procedure, yardsticks and models that traditional Linguistics and Literary Studies rely upon to research and knowledge production. The profound infusion of Web/internet, cyber/digital domains into contemporary linguistic/literary/textual practices makes the digitalization of the text, the ‘flood of publishing’ in soft and hard forms, the rise of the private communication spaces, utterances and conversation in person and on

social media and electronic devices important subjects of enquiry. In concrete term, researchers need to develop the capacity to delineate the quality of machine-induced texts, for instance, from the layered hypertext to the multimodal texts in words, images, video, sound and their fractured temporality or vulnerability in construction, reading, and viewing. In essence, there several kinds of texts and textual practices that Cybernetics and postmodernism inaugurate such as:

- The *Hypertext* which is accessible through or shown on an electronic device or computer with references or hyperlinks to other texts, which are often activated by clicking a mouse, pressing a key/button, or touching the screen of the device. The term *hypertext* was coined by Theodor H. Nelson in the 1960s to mean “nonsequential writing–text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen”.
- The *metatext* and *metatextuality* are important to enhancers and mediators in the reading process. The ‘Metatext’ is made up of the ‘textual elements’ that provide structure, organization, and facilitate commentary within a primary text, thereby enhancing reader comprehension and interaction. ‘Metatextuality’ ‘is the relationship between a text and itself...[it] is a self-referential literary device, used both implicitly and explicitly’.
- The *biotext* incorporates elements of biology, philosophy, and digital humanities into the ‘traditional boundaries’ of literary and cultural studies. The term *Biotext* was introduced by the Canadian writer and critic George Bowering, but its proponents span various fields, including language, literature and text-mining, thus validating its interdisciplinary application.

Postmodernism and the Textual and Interpretative Spaces

The Postmodern Era, historical, epistemic, technological and cultural forces shape Literary Production and Interpretation in Global,

Postcolonial and Diaspora contexts formations through the instrumentality of Poststructuralism which applies open-endedness and multidisciplinary approach to examine the presentation of human experience through literary creativity and criticism. The mixture of perceptions and methodologies enables the evaluation of the man-centeredness of the post-Enlightenment Era in which the human experience and existential condition that literature presents are axiomatic of the drift of postmodernity towards diversity, multiculturalism, possibility or relativity. In this context, Poststructuralist Literary Studies simultaneously approximates and critique of the Liberal Humanist, Formalist and Structuralist perception of reality and structure as stable, definable, knowable by affirming the incertitude of reality, objects, viewpoints and alienation as a quality of harsh existential conditions. In general, Literary Practice and Studies in the postmodern era are characterized by scepticism, anxiety and resignation due to the concern of writers, texts and critics/scholars with the Post-industrial malaise or failure of the modernization process to positively transform life. As the conceptual, methodological and analytical template of Literary Studies, Poststructuralism encompasses the works and insights of *Theorists* who rely on the deconstructive oeuvre of European Continental Philosophy such as Friedrich Nietzsche's 'doubling critique' and Martin Heidegger's 'destructive analysis', the repudiation of the stability of 'structure and the notions of simulation in the works of Derrida, Foucault and Baudrillard. At the core of postmodern Literary Studies therefore is the view that since the world is in a labyrinth, reality itself is fractured, relative and variegated, there is thus no possibility of uniform interpretation, no definite meaning but series of possible, at times conflicting meanings.

The 'worlds apart' oeuvre of postmodernity turns Literature into a reflection or representation as well as an autonomous domain of practice. This shift dislodges the Classical, Renaissance and Liberal Humanist notions of Literature as the sublime repository of human

experience and substitutes it with what Loytard described as the ‘incredulity towards meta-narratives’ in which: the text is a constructed aesthetic entity; the cohesion of Realist representation are ruptured by fragmentary, polyphonic techniques; and the vital role of the reader and reading process in the making of literary texts are recognized. The series of dislodgements, inversions, and the deconstructive mien of literary scholarship that this shift entails illustrate the manner in which the Poststructuralist-Postmodernist continuum encode ‘subterfuge’, ‘camouflage’, ‘simulation’ as the pragmatic and conceptual markers of the instability, uncertainty and survivalism that permeate material existence, life, and thought processes. In this regard, Poststructuralist Criticism apprehends the polyphony of Postmodernist Literary Practice as an analytical instrument for displacing the Platonic notion of Mimesis as semiotically-induced replication on the basis that the sign (language) *produces* as opposed to *reflecting* ‘reality’ as ‘a hyperreal. This inversion of verisimilitude displaces the depth-model of signs with what Baudrillard (..) calls ‘a weightless system’ of ‘surface-models’ where “the sign refers to nothing but more signs, writing to more writing, texts to other texts (p. 217). For Poststructuralism, this incredulity empanels diverse practices of literary/textual significations which diminish the singular, self-referentiality of literary imagination.

The Poststructuralism-Postmodernism interface thus leads to the conclusion that since signification is constantly deferred or never fully achieved within the text for and in itself, hermeneutics is mired in the endless slippage and sliding of language while meaning-making is affected by ambiguity. The text is at the centre of literary discourse because of its nebulousness, its being a material for and the problematics within Criticism and as Davis and Schleifer state in *Criticism and Culture: The Role of Critique in Modern Literary Theory* (1991), the text is “at each moment different from itself, turned against itself in the temporal folds of error and irony” (167). In this sense, Literary

Criticism is a disquisition that navigates the weaknesses of textualization and as Eagleton posits out in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), it acts upon the impasses of meaning or at the points where texts “get into trouble, come unstuck, offer to contradict themselves” (134). In other words, the prone-to slips character of textualization defines the provenance of Criticism in general and for Poststructuralist Criticism, this navigational power is at the core of the premises or tenets of hermeneutics some of which can be formulated as follows:

- i. Since meaning is multifaceted, relative and dispersed, the human experience that literary artefacts project are, like the texts themselves, forms of representation vulnerable to the fluid and changing nature of perception and interpretation.
- ii. Writing and language are not always within the full control of the writer and because the reader is not a party to or familiar with authorial intentions, writing and language are ingeminate, reproducible in innumerable contexts, and readable in divergent ways without the mediation of the author or addressee.
- iii. Textual meaning(s) cannot be solely revealed by reliance on authorial intention which in any event may not be the origin/subject of the text and is therefore not a reliable source of its possible meaning(s).
- iv. As a matter of procedure, interpretation should take cognizance of ‘the margins’, the ‘otherness’, silences’, ‘underlining influences’ and ‘outreach’ of the text which are vital elements in its formation.
- v. The text is a system of *traces*, a *pastiche*, and an *inscription* that denotes the possible and this nebulousness enables the Critic to generate, discover numerous meanings by evaluating the gaps, disjunctions, aporias, and fissures within texts.
- vi. As a matter of fact, the self is fragmented into a series of selves each of which is internally disjointed and marked by a multiplicity of elements, fragments, and splinters.

Poststructuralism and ICT-Mediated Literary Practice

The tenets cited above have a heuristic value to understanding how Poststructuralism treats the artistic rendition of Postmodernity and its ICT-mediated material and virtual spaces as an iterable epistemic, textual, semiotic, and graphic endeavour. In this regard, the writer's mastery and use of language, precepts and imagery are unbounded by the versatility of *e-lit*, *intersign lit*, the *hypertext*, and *cyberculture* as textual and hermeneutic practices that 'transform', 'open up', and 'relativize', artistic practices or as sites for contending significations, enunciations and meaning-making. In this context, the technological revolution has expanded or turned literary practice, including Postcolonial and Diaspora ones, into interminable aesthetic endeavours. The kind of 'democracy a come' the freedom of Art to 'say anything out of prohibitions' that Derrida (1992: 36, 42) envisions demonstrate the enormous 'form-expansion' instituted by the incursion of Information and Computer Technology (ICT) into Literary Practice. In the face of the inundating character of ICT-propelled automation, multimedia and cyber culture, Literature has become 'just a mark' or an 'essential drafting of a mark' or 'an agent' in the cyber space. Seen as such, 'literature' functions, as Peter Swirski posits in *From Literature to Biterature* (2013: 5-6), as *biterature*, *bitic literature* or *e-lit* which is constituted by texts constructed on strings of binary digits from the instructional algorithms of the computer. This interface turns the literary space into the meeting point of narrative intelligence and artificial emotion and the potentials of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as author, co-creator, analyst and disseminator enshrine aesthetic complementarity in which human agency is involved in programming while AI technologies imitate human communication and generate stories by tapping conventional modes narration. Invariably, the convergence of literature and ICT foregrounds the author as any device, human or nonhuman, in the production chain of texts or creative work,

thus affirming Derrida's description of 'literature' as an 'iterative structure' impervious to the authority of *consciousness*, a kind of writing outside the control of artistic vision and 'separated at birth' from the author, its 'father-subject'. In essence, the enormous pressure exerted on the identity of literature by postmodernism turns it into an ambivalent phenomenon characterized by changing notions and as Eagleton (2012) states, when "people at the moment":

...call a piece of writing literary, they have one of five things in mind, or some combination of them. They mean by 'literary' a work which is fictional, or which yields significant insight into human experience as opposed to reporting empirical truths, or which uses language in a peculiarly heightened, figurative or self-conscious way, or which is not practical in the sense that shopping lists are, or which is highly valued as a piece of writing... we may call these factors the fictional, moral, linguistic, non-pragmatic and normative... Texts that combine these factors...are generally taken as paradigmatically literary. But no work classified as literary needs to meet all these criteria, and the absence of any one of these features need not be enough to disqualify it from the category. In this sense, none of these attributes is a necessary condition of literary status (25-6).

Postmodernism and Literary Practice in Postcolonial Spaces

Contemporary Literary Studies are underlined by that fact the global diffusion of Postmodernist and Poststructuralist theorizations has transformed World Literatures into simultaneously specific and transcendent, fixed and flexible phenomena that epitomize, probe and express human experience of historical events, cultural diversity and the permeation of technology and cyberculture. This expansiveness encodes a synchrony in which the incredulity of postmodern art to the grand narrative, the ascension of e-lit, cyberculture, the abstractness of language and the fluidity of artistic vision have made literary practice a multifaceted and dispersed mode of apprehending the world of things. This implies that the circumscription of Literature by monumental

technological, cultural and epistemic changes illustrates its versatility as a semiotic field, a symbolic structure and a discursive site for interrogating, conceptualizing and re-presenting the instances, tensions and ambivalences of historico-temporal changes through new forms and modes. In this sense, Literature actively participates in the evolution of postmodernity and is thus conditioned by such historical, conceptual and ideological parameters as literary tradition, identity-formation, national-development, technological and environmental changes or the tension between the material hyper progress of postmodernity the iniquities that typify its postmodern condition. In the literary sphere, the use of predominantly Modernist textualization to signify the disruptiveness of underdevelopment anticipates the destabilization of the affinity between literature of social commitment and the modernization process. This rift and its frictions, disarrays and circumventions hold the relationship between globalism and economic nationalism in constant tension while affirming the Poststructuralist notions of writing, reading and interpretation as enactments of incredulity, possibility and indeterminacy.

Poststructuralist Criticism also investigates how postmodern literary practices designate Postcolonial and Diaspora social formations as dysfunctional, inhuman, tyrannical, and vulnerable and this 'politicization' of Poststructuralist tenets by the partisanship of the Postcolonial Condition exerts pressure on preceding 'Literary Practices and Traditions'. The prominence of postmodernist aesthetics and Poststructuralist poetic has therefore ruptured the utilitarianism of Postcolonial writing that requires writers to be committed champions of nation-building. This separation emanates from the opposition of post-independence textualization to the reduction of postcolonial societies into underdeveloped, exploitative, and estranged entities under the tutelage of vicious and repressive ruling classes. This turbulence changed literary practice into a phenomenon defined by

bifurcation, discordance and divergence for which reason Poststructuralist Criticism treats the relationship between art, the artist, and the material Space as problematics. Consequently, the 'paradigm shifts' in Postcolonial Literary Practice and Criticism depict how the postmodern condition has erased patriotism and replaced it with survivalist, acquisitive and other nefarious practices which encourage pecking-order, self-interest, duplicity, amorality and violence. In depicting this inverted situation, Postcolonial Literature relates the tragedy of social life to the normalization of absurdity and disorder, the permanence of inequality and the maturation and hegemony of predatory elite. In this new world of blind materialism, cultural, religious and family spaces serve as sites for the replication and metaphors of deformity, failures, traumas and deviations. In addition, the paradigm shift entails privileging the fringe or the marginal space and giving it a voice with which to tell its own story. The narrative of the fringe conflates contingent discourses of identity, race, gender, and nationality, especially in their centrality to the processes of marginalization, resistance and self-definition within and outside local, national and international boundaries.

Linguistics, Literary Studies and Multidisciplinary Approaches

The postmodern condition and its array of signifiers such as globalization, the technological revolution, multiculturalism has tremendous impact on knowledge formation and for the Humanities, this entails an expansion of its concern with man, nature and society with the exploration of the global implications of the 'human condition, the fate of man and humanity in space and time. As response, signification, and critique of man in society, the Humanities have since the 1980s developed an extensive epistemic synergy or interdisciplinary collaboration that enables their pundits to take and deploy insights, methodologies and analytical models from other disciplines to effectively explicate the complexity, affinity and intensity of human experience. Philosophically this intersection of epistemes was

based on the assumption that the trans-territorial, nationality, gender and status blending of human societies, the global village, under the banner of 'the End of history' or the attainment of the highest progress possible, 'the Free World Order', 'the Triumph of Civilization, 'the Post-industrial Consumer society' in which technology replaces human labour, it works and man eats, and the Universality of the Modernization Mission have made existential conditions and human predicament so complex that a combination of epistemes is required to investigate, explicate and invent ways of regulating them. Invariably, the Humanities, including Linguistics and Literary studies need Interdisciplinary (between affiliated fields), Multidisciplinary (across neighbouring subjects) and Transdisciplinary (from any relevant field) to thrive and produce knowledge with broad relevance and applicability to human condition. In other words, Postmodernism has pushed or created the conditions for the Human Sciences to tilt towards it Globalist, Incorporationist and Universalist mien and this structuration accounts for the rise of the phenomenon of epistemic interface.

As branches of learning, the Humanities encompass Philosophy, History, Archaeology, Literature, Linguistics, Anthropology, and the Social Sciences employ Qualitative approaches which rely on concepts and words on the page for analysis to make connections between things, events actions and relationships. While there are many disciplines also seek to understand the human condition, the approaches and methodologies of the Humanities are primarily interpretive, analytical, critical, and/or reflective as distinguished from the mainly empirical approaches of the natural and social sciences. Since the Humanities are a related group of disciplines that both mirror and interpret that which human beings have believed, it means that there is an inherent cross-referencing and intertextual relations among all the subject areas such that, for example: History

involves narratives and story-telling; Linguistics engages the written texts in the same way as literature undertakes critical examination of figurative devices in a textual representation; Philosophy entails writing and notation as central strategies in analytical thinking. The need for multi-disciplinary approach in the Humanities is also premised on the idea that learning should not be limited to one branch of knowledge but undertaken through common ancillary knowledge, skill, and practical wisdom, episteme, *techné*, and *phronesis* in order to give a pride of place to integrated education based on lifelong learning and interdisciplinary studies.

In concluding this address, let me once again restate my deep appreciation for the invitation which I regard as a privilege. The point should not be lost that the intense state of crises, anxiety, trepidation and uncertainty that afflict the World we live in today require the Humanities and their Scholars to rigorously investigate and in reality, repudiate the excesses of postmodernism. This huge challenge requires, as the failure of Enlightenment and Industrialization did in the 19th Century, a return to the traditional value of the Humanities as Discourse, Critiques and epistemes and this entails meticulous re-assessment and realignment of their identity, viability and dynamism as investigative, pedagogical and discursive knowledge forms. In this respect, the Era of High technology and Cyberculture is not a diversion, threat or obstruction but a profound challenge and opportunity which Scholars must explore, navigate, apprehend and possibly change. Thank you very much and best wishes.

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