



Language, Identity, and Cultural Negotiation in Multilingual Literary Narratives

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Abstract

This study examines how multilingual literary narratives use language variation to position identity and negotiate cultural authority across colonial contexts. A comparative qualitative content analysis was conducted on four colonial-era novels: Marah Rusli's Sitti Nurbaya and Marco Kartodikromo's Student Hidjo from the Dutch East Indies, and Rudyard Kipling's Kim and E. M. Forster's A Passage to India from British India. The analysis covered 80 multilingual episodes, with 20 episodes selected from each novel and coded according to structural form, identity function, cultural domain, and reader accommodation. Embedded lexical items represented 37.5% of the episodes, while honorific or title insertions accounted for 26.2%, making these the two most frequent structural forms. Colonial status or power was the most frequent identity function at 30.0%, followed by cultural belonging at 21.2%, while Indonesian narratives showed greater emphasis on education and mobility and Anglo-Indian narratives showed greater representation of religion and community. Reader accommodation was selective, with 38.8% of episodes leaving marked expressions without gloss or explicit explanation. The findings indicate that multilingualism operates as a narrative distribution of social knowledge, positioning characters through institutional power, cultural affiliation, mobility, solidarity, and resistance while regulating readers' access to culturally marked meanings.

Keywords: Cultural Negotiation, Code-Switching, Identity, Literary Multilingualism, Reader Accommodation.



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INTRODUCTION

Literary multilingualism is not a decorative addition to otherwise monolingual narration, but a constitutive dimension of narrative organization through which relations among speakers, institutions, cultural repertoires, and implied readers are constructed and negotiated. Recent developments in literary multilingualism studies have shifted attention from identifying the occurrence of separate languages toward examining how multilingual forms generate textual, social, and interpretive effects within literary discourse (Dembeck & Taylor-Batty, 2023). Code-switching, lexical insertion, untranslated expressions, stylized accents, and metalinguistic commentary can identify social position while simultaneously determining which cultural meanings are explained, translated, or left opaque. This broader orientation resonates with translanguaging approaches that conceptualize language practices as fluid semiotic assemblages rather than as interactions between strictly bounded linguistic systems (Pennycook, 2017). The resulting analytical perspective positions multilingual writing as a site where linguistic resources, cultural knowledge, and social identities intersect rather than merely as evidence of bilingual competence. Recent literary studies further demonstrate that alternation between languages can operate as a narrative mechanism through affect, translation, characterization, and metalinguistic reflection, making linguistic choice integral to the construction of literary meaning (Baldo & Deganutti, 2024).

Identity in multilingual fiction is consequently produced through patterned linguistic choices rather than through the simple presence of more than one language, because particular expressions become associated with social histories, cultural affiliations, institutional authority, and interpersonal relations. Titles, kinship terms, bureaucratic vocabulary, school language, religious forms, and everyday cultural items can index different fields of authority, while code-switching may signal

mobility, intimacy, hierarchy, diasporic affiliation, or resistance. Literary multilingualism research has shown that such alternation becomes especially consequential when characters move between cultural or institutional domains in which linguistic choices carry different social meanings (Montes-Alcalá, 2024). The same linguistic form may therefore construct intimacy in one interaction while marking distance, exclusion, or institutional power in another, making identity a relational achievement rather than a stable textual attribute. This understanding is compatible with translingual theories that regard multilingual practice as an exercise of agency through which speakers negotiate identities and social relations across linguistic boundaries (Canagarajah, 2013). The analytical problem is therefore not only which language appears, but what social relation, cultural affiliation, and position of authority become available through that choice.

The concept of cultural negotiation becomes particularly productive because multilingual texts distribute cultural knowledge unevenly between characters and readers, creating different degrees of accessibility, familiarity, and interpretive participation. Some marked expressions are immediately translated, others are explained through surrounding narration, while others remain unglossed, and these differences influence how readers encounter the represented culture. Grutman (2023) argues that multilingual writing necessarily constructs assumptions about readers because textual decisions concerning linguistic accessibility determine how imagined audiences are positioned in relation to unfamiliar language. An unglossed honorific may presuppose cultural familiarity, require contextual learning, or deliberately preserve linguistic distance, whereas direct translation may widen accessibility while simultaneously foregrounding the mediating function of the text. Such choices make translation, non-translation, and contextual explanation part of the narrative architecture through which cultural difference is managed. Work on literary multilingualism has increasingly connected these reader-oriented strategies with aesthetic practices of translation, demonstrating that multilingual texts can represent linguistic plurality while simultaneously staging the processes through which that plurality becomes intelligible (Mole, 2024).

Colonial fiction provides an especially productive field for examining these processes because colonial rule established administrative, educational, religious, and racialized linguistic hierarchies while leaving local repertoires indispensable to everyday communication. Colonial narratives consequently contain layered linguistic orders in which the language of government, schooling, religion, kinship, commerce, and locality does not necessarily coincide, allowing textual language to register social stratification while also exposing the instability of colonial categories. Research on multilingual literary cultures in colonial and postcolonial contexts emphasizes that linguistic plurality is closely connected to mobility, authority, translation, and competing forms of belonging rather than functioning merely as an inventory of foreign lexical items (Orsini, 2023b). The resulting linguistic texture can reveal how colonial subjects occupy overlapping cultural positions that cannot be adequately represented through a single linguistic code. Indonesian literary history makes this relation particularly visible because early twentieth-century prose developed within a multilingual colonial environment involving Malay/Indonesian, regional languages, Dutch, Arabic-derived religious vocabulary, and institutional registers associated with colonial government and education. Within such a context, *Sitti Nurbaya* places Minangkabau titles and kinship forms alongside Dutch-derived institutional and material vocabulary, while *Student Hidjo* moves among Malay, Javanese forms of address, Dutch expressions, and the social worlds of colonial education and travel (Rusli, 1922; Kartodikromo, 1919).

British Indian fiction offers a related but structurally different multilingual field in which linguistic plurality intersects with colonial hierarchy, religious difference, mobility, and contested cultural belonging. *Kim* uses terms such as sahib, babu, vernacular expressions, religious labels, place names, and stylized speech to construct a protagonist whose movement across colonial categories is simultaneously linguistic and social. *A Passage to India* similarly incorporates Anglo-Indian vocabulary, titles, and culturally marked expressions within a narrative organized around institutional division and failed interpersonal intimacy (Forster, 1924). These works demonstrate that multilingual literary practices can mediate access to social worlds that colonial English cannot fully contain, yet their linguistic configurations emerge from different imperial histories and cultural repertoires. Research on multilingual Indian literary cultures has emphasized the historical importance of vernacular interaction and multilingual literary formation, challenging models that position English as an isolated or self-sufficient medium of colonial representation (Orsini, 2023a). Indonesian

scholarship likewise continues to identify code-mixing and code-switching as significant mechanisms for representing cultural identity and social location in novels, although many studies remain concentrated on classification within individual texts rather than comparative interpretation across distinct colonial contexts (Utami & Markamah, 2023). The coexistence of these approaches reveals a productive comparative problem: similar colonial hierarchies may generate different strategies of linguistic representation because the cultural repertoires, institutional structures, and assumed reader communities are not identical.

Existing research provides strong foundations for interpreting code-switching as identity work, yet a more integrated account of linguistic form, cultural negotiation, and reader accommodation remains necessary. First, literary studies frequently privilege a single novel or author, which can make it difficult to distinguish work-specific stylistic preferences from recurring narrative functions of multilingualism (Batool et al., 2022). Second, Indonesian studies often identify and classify forms of code-mixing or code-switching without systematically examining how unfamiliar linguistic and cultural elements are mediated for readers. Third, scholarship on diasporic and multilingual fiction demonstrates that language alternation can articulate identity, but the relationship between identity construction and the distribution of cultural accessibility across different colonial literary traditions remains comparatively underexamined. The absence of a controlled cross-corpus comparison limits understanding of whether similar multilingual devices perform comparable identity functions across different historical and imperial settings. This study therefore examines four narratives—*Sitti Nurbaya*, *Student Hidjo*, *Kim*, and *A Passage to India*—through a common analytical framework focused on the structural forms of multilingualism, their identity functions, the cultural domains they negotiate, and the strategies through which readers are accommodated or distanced. The study does not treat the coded sample as an exhaustive count of every multilingual token in each novel, but uses a balanced comparative corpus to establish a common analytical unit through which language can be examined as a mechanism for positioning identity, cultural authority, and reader access. Its theoretical contribution lies in connecting literary multilingualism with cultural negotiation, while its methodological contribution lies in placing Indonesian colonial fiction within a comparative framework that brings it into sustained dialogue with British Indian literary narratives.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a comparative qualitative content analysis within literary and linguistic research, drawing on literary multilingualism, code-switching, and translingual approaches to examine how language operates in the construction of identity and cultural negotiation. The primary data are textual passages from four colonial-era novels selected through purposive corpus selection because each represents sustained interaction between colonial linguistic structures and local or culturally specific repertoires, while translingual approaches provide a framework for examining linguistic practices beyond rigid boundaries between named languages (Canagarajah, 2013). The corpus comprises the following works:

Table 1. Primary Literary Corpus

No.	Novel	Author	Year	Colonial Context	Corpus Role
1	<i>Sitti Nurbaya: Kasih tak Sampai</i>	Marah Rusli	1922	Dutch East Indies	Indonesian colonial narrative
2	<i>Student Hidjo</i>	Mas Marco Kartodikromo	1919	Dutch East Indies	Indonesian colonial narrative
3	<i>Kim</i>	Rudyard Kipling	1901	British India	Anglo-Indian colonial narrative
4	<i>A Passage to India</i>	E. M. Forster	1924	British India	Anglo-Indian colonial narrative

The first pair represents multilingual narrative practice in the Dutch East Indies, whereas the second pair represents British Indian colonial fiction, allowing comparison without assuming that the two imperial systems were historically or linguistically equivalent. Publicly accessible digital editions

and available textual versions were consulted for textual verification, while the selection of passages followed a common analytical definition of literary multilingualism that treats multilingual elements as meaningful components of narrative form rather than merely as instances of foreign vocabulary (Dembeck & Taylor-Batty, 2023). The analytical framework focuses on four interconnected dimensions: structural form, identity function, cultural domain, and reader accommodation, thereby linking the linguistic features of each passage to their narrative and sociocultural functions. This framework is consistent with research demonstrating that literary code-switching may simultaneously perform linguistic, metalinguistic, affective, and narrative functions within fictional discourse (Baldo & Deganutti, 2024). The unit of analysis is a multilingual episode, defined as a bounded textual passage containing a marked lexical item, title, phrase, clause, stylized speech form, or explicit metalinguistic comment that activates a linguistic repertoire distinguishable from the immediate narrative matrix.

Data analysis proceeds through structured close reading and two-stage coding applied consistently across the four novels. Eighty multilingual episodes, with twenty from each work, are selected across the early, middle, and later portions of each narrative, followed by provisional coding and recoding using stabilized category definitions. Each episode is coded according to structural form, identity function, cultural domain, and reader accommodation, with ambiguous cases resolved through contextual interpretation. Reader accommodation includes translation, contextual explanation, repetition or parallel expression, and absence of glossing, reflecting the role of imagined readers in multilingual literary construction (Grutman, 2023). Descriptive frequencies, percentages, and Shannon entropy are used to compare patterns of identity functions, while cross-corpus aggregation is conducted only after work-level patterns have been established (McCreedy, 2024). Analytical rigor is maintained through consistent coding rules, equal allocation of episodes, transparent aggregation procedures, and contextual close reading, consistent with approaches that treat literary code-switching as a multidimensional narrative resource (Gardner-Chloros & Weston, 2015).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Multilingual Structures in Narrative Form

The analysis of eighty multilingual episodes demonstrates that multilingualism constitutes a heterogeneous structural resource across the four novels rather than a uniform pattern of switching between two standardized languages (Dembeck & Taylor-Batty, 2023). Each text incorporates marked linguistic resources through embedded lexical items, honorifics or titles, phrase and clause switching, metalinguistic naming, and stylized representations of other-language speech (Gardner-Chloros & Weston, 2015). The distribution of these forms indicates that multilingual meaning can be constructed through minimal lexical insertions as well as through more overt changes in the language of interaction (Grutman, 2024). Literary multilingualism therefore operates through different degrees of textual visibility, ranging from isolated linguistic markers to extended representations of multilingual interaction (Mole, 2024). Such variation supports the view that literary code-switching can function simultaneously as a linguistic, metalinguistic, affective, and narrative resource (Baldo & Deganutti, 2024). The structural diversity identified in the corpus consequently provides the basis for examining how linguistic form contributes to identity positioning and cultural negotiation.

The Indonesian pair presents multilingual structures through layered relationships among Malay or Indonesian narration, local status registers, Dutch colonial vocabulary, and religious terminology (Orsini, 2023b). *Sitti Nurbaya* relies prominently on Minangkabau titles, Dutch-derived institutional or material vocabulary, and Arabic-derived religious expressions within a Malay or Indonesian narrative matrix. *Student Hidjo* more visibly stages Dutch within encounters involving education, administration, travel, and social mobility, while Javanese honorific registers add another layer of social differentiation. The coexistence of these resources indicates that the novels do not construct multilingualism as a symmetrical Indonesian–Dutch bilingual system (Canagarajah, 2013). Translingual approaches instead emphasize the flexible mobilization of linguistic resources across historically produced boundaries between named languages (Li, 2018). The Indonesian corpus therefore represents multilingualism as a repertoire-based phenomenon in which colonial, regional, institutional, and religious resources participate in the same narrative field (Pennycook, 2017).

The Anglo-Indian pair demonstrates comparable structural complexity within a different colonial linguistic environment (Orsini, 2023a). *Kim* integrates Hindi-, Urdu-, Punjabi-, Tibetan-, and

religiously associated expressions into an English narrative matrix, making linguistic competence part of movement across cultural and social environments. *A Passage to India* incorporates Anglo-Indian vocabulary, culturally marked titles, Hindi- and Urdu-linked expressions, and institutional terminology into predominantly English narration. The difference between the two novels indicates that multilingual representation does not require sustained alternation between languages to make linguistic difference narratively significant (Grutman, 2024). Embedded cultural terminology can preserve associations with particular communities while remaining grammatically integrated into the dominant narrative language (Mole, 2024). Literary multilingualism consequently involves the organization of linguistic plurality through different textual strategies rather than a single model of bilingual representation (Dembeck & Taylor-Batty, 2023). This pattern also demonstrates why structural analysis must distinguish the formal presence of multilingual elements from the identity and cultural functions they acquire in context.

Table 2. Corpus and Balanced Sampling Profile

Work	Author / Year	Narrative Matrix	Marked Repertoires Represented	Analytical Sample
<i>Sitti Nurbaya</i>	Marah Rusli / 1922	Malay / Indonesian	Minangkabau titles; Dutch-derived institutional and material lexicon; Arabic-derived religious forms	20 episodes
<i>Student Hidjo</i>	Marco Kartodikromo / 1918	Malay / Indonesian	Dutch; Javanese honorific registers; colonial administrative and educational vocabulary	20 episodes
<i>Kim</i>	Rudyard Kipling / 1901	English	Hindi/Urdu/Punjabi-linked forms; Anglo-Indian titles; Tibetan and religious vocabulary	20 episodes
<i>A Passage to India</i>	E. M. Forster / 1924	English	Anglo-Indian vocabulary; Hindi/Urdu-linked titles and cultural terms; institutional registers	20 episodes

Table 2 establishes an equal analytical allocation of twenty multilingual episodes for each novel, enabling comparison of structural patterns without equating their historical language environments. The marked repertoires differ substantially across the four works because each corpus reflects distinct combinations of local, colonial, institutional, religious, and regional linguistic resources (Orsini, 2023b). The Indonesian novels combine Malay or Indonesian narrative matrices with Minangkabau, Javanese, Dutch, and Arabic-derived forms, whereas the Anglo-Indian novels combine English with South Asian, Tibetan, religious, and Anglo-Indian repertoires. Such variation demonstrates that equal sampling concerns analytical comparability rather than linguistic equivalence (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2023). The distinction is important because multilingual literary practices are shaped by relationships among language, audience, identity, and historical context (Grutman, 2023). The corpus consequently permits structural comparison while retaining the sociolinguistic specificity of each literary environment.

The structural coding reveals a clear concentration around relatively small linguistic units within the eighty-episode sample. Embedded lexical items constitute 30 episodes, representing 37.5% of the corpus, while honorific or title insertion accounts for 21 episodes, representing 26.2%. These two categories therefore comprise 51 of the 80 episodes and together account for 63.75% of the analytical sample. Phrase or clause switching occurs in eight episodes, while metalinguistic naming or glossing and stylized other-language speech occur in twelve and nine episodes respectively. The predominance of lexical and title-level marking indicates that multilingual identity can be activated without disrupting the grammatical continuity of the dominant narrative language (Gardner-Chloros &

Weston, 2015). Similar research on literary code-switching demonstrates that relatively small linguistic insertions can carry substantial social, cultural, and narrative significance (Baldo, 2024). The distribution therefore suggests that the structural visibility of multilingualism does not necessarily correspond to the textual length of the multilingual element.

Table 3. Structural Forms of Multilingual Episodes by Work

Structural form	<i>Sitti Nurbaya</i>	<i>Student Hidjo</i>	<i>Kim</i>	<i>A Passage to India</i>	Total	Share
Embedded lexical item	7	7	7	9	30	37.5%
Honorific/title insertion	8	3	6	4	21	26.2%
Phrase/clause switch	0	5	2	1	8	10.0%
Metalinguistic naming/gloss	3	3	3	3	12	15.0%
Stylized other-language speech	2	2	2	3	9	11.2%
Total	20	20	20	20	80	100.0%

Table 3 shows that the four novels distribute multilingual structures differently despite their identical analytical sample sizes. *Sitti Nurbaya* contains eight honorific or title insertions and no phrase or clause switches, indicating that linguistic differentiation is strongly embedded in forms of address and culturally marked terminology. *Student Hidjo* contains five of the eight phrase or clause switches in the entire corpus, making overt language alternation particularly prominent in its multilingual structure. The concentration of clause-level switching in *Student Hidjo* is consistent with the role of code-switching as a contextual resource for marking social relations and interactional shifts (Gumperz, 1982). *Kim* presents a more dispersed structural distribution across lexical items, titles, and other forms, corresponding to its representation of movement across several linguistic and cultural environments. *A Passage to India* records nine embedded lexical items, suggesting a stronger reliance on culturally marked vocabulary within an otherwise continuous English narrative. The contrasting distributions demonstrate that literary multilingualism can range from relatively unobtrusive lexical incorporation to highly visible language alternation (Grutman, 2024).

The structural differences become more analytically significant when the forms are considered as mechanisms of social and cultural representation. Embedded lexical items allow local concepts, institutional terminology, material objects, and culturally specific expressions to enter the dominant narrative language without requiring syntactic disruption. Honorifics and titles operate more directly as social markers because their interpretation depends on culturally situated systems of status, respect, affiliation, and interpersonal relations (Myers-Scotton, 1993). Phrase or clause switching produces stronger metalinguistic visibility because the transition between linguistic resources becomes part of the represented interaction (Azhar & Sutrisno, 2023). Metalinguistic naming and glossing make linguistic difference even more explicit by drawing attention to the presence and interpretation of another linguistic resource (Ala-Risku, 2024). Stylized other-language speech can further construct social difference through the literary representation of voice, register, accent, or linguistic competence (Claros, 2024). These structural distinctions show that multilingual form functions as an organized narrative resource through which language boundaries, social relations, and cultural knowledge are made visible to readers (Grutman, 2024).

Language Choice and Identity Positioning

Language choice across the corpus demonstrates that multilingual elements are closely associated with the positioning of speakers within colonial, cultural, interpersonal, educational, and religious relations. The identity-function coding identifies colonial status or power as the most frequent function, appearing in 24 of the 80 multilingual episodes, or 30.0% of the corpus. Cultural belonging constitutes the second-largest category with 17 episodes, followed by resistance or boundary marking with 12 episodes. Education and mobility account for 10 episodes, interpersonal solidarity for 9 episodes, and religion or community affiliation for 8 episodes. The distribution indicates that multilingual choices do not merely identify the language background of characters but organize their positions within unequal and overlapping social relations. Research on literary code-

switching similarly demonstrates that language alternation can function as a resource for constructing social identity, negotiating belonging, and signaling relationships between speakers (Batool et al., 2022). Identity in the corpus is therefore produced through contextual language selection rather than through a fixed correspondence between a particular language and a predetermined identity category.

The prominence of colonial status or power indicates that multilingual choices frequently become mechanisms for representing relationships structured by imperial authority. Twenty-four episodes are associated with this function, showing that linguistic difference is repeatedly connected to institutional hierarchy, social privilege, and access to colonial structures. In *Sitti Nurbaya*, Dutch-derived institutional vocabulary and culturally marked forms can position characters in relation to colonial modernity while local titles simultaneously preserve alternative systems of status. In *Student Hidjo*, Dutch appears more directly within contexts of education, administration, travel, and social advancement, making language competence relevant to the negotiation of colonial opportunity. Such patterns correspond with the view that code-switching can index social relations and institutional positioning rather than functioning only as a communicative adjustment (Myers-Scotton, 1993). The association between language and power is also compatible with translingual perspectives that conceptualize linguistic practices as shaped by historically unequal relations rather than by neutral movement among equivalent codes (Canagarajah, 2013). Language choice consequently becomes one of the narrative mechanisms through which colonial hierarchy is represented and negotiated.

Cultural belonging constitutes 17 episodes, indicating that multilingual resources also operate to establish attachment to particular communities, regions, and cultural traditions. The function is especially visible when local expressions remain linguistically marked within a dominant narrative matrix, allowing cultural affiliation to remain perceptible without requiring extended language switching. In *Sitti Nurbaya*, Minangkabau titles provide socially recognizable markers of cultural location and relational identity within the broader Malay or Indonesian narrative environment. In *Kim*, South Asian linguistic resources similarly contribute to the protagonist's movement among culturally differentiated communities and social networks. Such practices demonstrate that identity can be articulated through partial linguistic affiliation rather than complete alignment with a single named language (Protassova & Yelenevskaya, 2024). Research on diasporic and multilingual fiction further shows that code-switching may articulate cultural belonging by allowing characters and narrators to activate linguistic resources associated with particular histories and communities (Hamamra et al., 2025). The corpus therefore treats cultural identity as relational and situational, with language choice providing a means of foregrounding affiliation without eliminating other identity positions.

Table 4. Identity Functions of Multilingual Episodes By Work

Identity Function	<i>Sitti Nurbaya</i>	<i>Student Hidjo</i>	<i>Kim</i>	<i>A Passage to India</i>	Total	Share
Colonial status / power	6	6	5	7	24	30.0%
Cultural belonging	5	3	5	4	17	21.2%
Interpersonal solidarity	2	2	3	2	9	11.2%
Education/mobility	2	5	2	1	10	12.5%
Religion/community	2	0	3	3	8	10.0%
Resistance/boundary	3	4	2	3	12	15.0%
Total	20	20	20	20	80	100.0%

Table 4 demonstrates that colonial status or power is the dominant identity function in each individual novel, although its relative share differs across the four works. *A Passage to India* records the highest number of such episodes, with seven of twenty, whereas *Kim* records five. The Indonesian novels each contain six episodes associated with colonial status or power, producing a comparable pattern across the two literary contexts. Cultural belonging remains the second most frequent function overall, but its distribution varies from five episodes in *Sitti Nurbaya* and *Kim* to three in *Student Hidjo*. Education and mobility are particularly prominent in *Student Hidjo*, where five of the twenty multilingual episodes perform this identity function. This concentration suggests that language choice in the novel is closely connected with aspirations toward education, travel, and participation in colonial modernity, a relationship also identified in research examining multilingual writing as a site

of agency and identity negotiation (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2023). The table therefore indicates that similar multilingual forms can participate in different identity processes depending on the institutional and interpersonal context in which they occur.

Interpersonal solidarity accounts for nine episodes and demonstrates that multilingual choice can also reduce social distance rather than merely mark hierarchy or difference. The function occurs in all four novels, with *Kim* containing three such episodes and each of the other works containing two. These instances suggest that shared linguistic resources may establish familiarity, affiliation, or interpersonal alignment between characters who occupy particular social or cultural networks. The presence of solidarity alongside colonial status or power is significant because it prevents multilingualism from being interpreted solely as an index of domination. Code-switching research has shown that language selection may simultaneously negotiate social relationships and construct identities through interactional alignment (Azhar & Sutrisno, 2023). Comparable findings in Indonesian literary studies indicate that mixed linguistic resources can mark character relationships and social identity through choices embedded within otherwise dominant-language narratives (Sofyaningrum et al., 2023; Pratama et al., 2025). Multilingual language choice thus operates across both hierarchical and affiliative dimensions of identity construction.

Resistance or boundary marking appears in 12 episodes and represents 15.0% of the total corpus, indicating that multilingual resources can also distinguish characters from dominant linguistic expectations. Such episodes include linguistic choices that preserve cultural difference, create distance from institutional authority, or foreground an identity that is not fully absorbed into the dominant linguistic order. *Student Hidjo* contains four resistance or boundary episodes, while *Sitti Nurbaya* and *A Passage to India* each contain three and *Kim* contains two. The distribution suggests that resistance does not require explicit political statements because linguistic difference itself can function as a marker of non-assimilation. Research on literary multilingualism has similarly demonstrated that code-switching can challenge assumptions of linguistic uniformity by maintaining alternative cultural and social affiliations within dominant-language texts (Montes-Alcalá, 2024). The same principle can be observed in diasporic fiction, where multilingual practices may articulate identity through selective retention of linguistic resources associated with a community of origin (Purnawati et al., 2025). In the four novels, resistance therefore emerges not simply through what characters say but also through the linguistic resources they retain, activate, or refuse to replace.

The distribution of identity functions can be examined further through entropy values, which indicate the degree to which multilingual episodes are distributed across the six coded identity categories. *Kim* records the highest entropy at 2.485, followed by *Sitti Nurbaya* at 2.428, *A Passage to India* at 2.364, and *Student Hidjo* at 2.228. The relatively high values across all four novels indicate that multilingualism is not concentrated exclusively in one identity function even though colonial status or power is the most frequent category in every work. This distribution supports a multidimensional understanding of literary identity in which language choice may simultaneously relate to institutional status, cultural belonging, mobility, solidarity, religion, and resistance. The analytical value of entropy in this context lies in identifying distributional complexity rather than assigning a hierarchy of identity importance to the novels. A comparable emphasis on fluidity and multiplicity can be found in literary research that examines national and cultural identity through shifting multilingual configurations (McCreedy, 2024). The entropy pattern therefore reinforces the qualitative evidence that language choice functions as a flexible identity resource whose meaning depends on the social and narrative context of each multilingual episode.

Table 5. Distributional Entropy of Identity Functions by Work

Work	Dominant Identity Function	Dominant n	Dominant Share	Identity Entropy
<i>Sitti Nurbaya</i>	Colonial status / power	6	30.0%	2.428
<i>Student Hidjo</i>	Colonial status / power	6	30.0%	2.228
<i>Kim</i>	Colonial status / power	5	25.0%	2.485
<i>A Passage to India</i>	Colonial status / power	7	35.0%	2.364

Table 5 shows that no novel assigns more than 35.0% of its multilingual episodes to its dominant identity function, confirming that multilingual identity construction remains distributed across multiple categories. *Student Hidjo* has the lowest entropy value, which corresponds to its stronger concentration around colonial status or power and education or mobility. *Kim* has the highest entropy value because its twenty episodes are comparatively dispersed across cultural belonging, interpersonal solidarity, religion, and colonial status or power. The entropy values therefore complement the frequency counts by showing that the prominence of colonial power does not eliminate other identity functions from the narrative structure. Such multidimensional identity construction is consistent with research describing translanguaging as a flexible practice through which speakers mobilize linguistic resources according to context, purpose, and identity position (García & Li, 2014). Literary narratives similarly allow multilingual choices to connect personal, communal, institutional, and ideological identities within the same textual environment (Lei & Coronel-Molina, 2024). The combined frequency and entropy patterns consequently position language choice as a dynamic mechanism of identity positioning rather than a simple indicator of linguistic origin.

Cultural Negotiation and Reader Accommodation

Cultural negotiation in the corpus is most visible in the domains through which multilingual expressions connect language with institutions, social status, religion, education, material culture, and mobility (Orsini, 2023b). Governance and institutional contexts constitute the largest cultural domain, accounting for 23 of the 80 episodes, or 28.7% of the sample (Orsini, 2023a). Kinship, status, and honorific relations form the second-largest domain with 16 episodes, representing 20.0% of the corpus (Myers-Scotton, 1993). Place and mobility account for 12 episodes, while everyday material culture contributes 11 episodes, demonstrating that multilingual marking extends beyond explicitly political or institutional contexts (Pennycook, 2017). Religion and ritual and education and modernity each occur in nine episodes, indicating that cultural negotiation also operates through belief systems and encounters with modern institutions (García & Li, 2014). The distribution demonstrates that multilingual expressions function as cultural resources through which literary narratives position local practices in relation to colonial and cosmopolitan structures (Dembeck & Taylor-Batty, 2023).

The prominence of governance and institutional language indicates that colonial multilingualism is strongly connected to bureaucratic, educational, and administrative structures (Orsini, 2023a). The 23 episodes in this domain show that linguistic difference frequently becomes visible when characters encounter institutions that regulate mobility, status, education, or access to authority (Canagarajah, 2013). In *Sitti Nurbaya*, Dutch-derived institutional vocabulary places local characters within a colonial administrative environment while Minangkabau titles preserve culturally specific systems of social recognition (Rusli, 1922). In *Student Hidjo*, Dutch and colonial educational vocabulary become particularly salient in contexts involving schooling, travel, and social advancement (Kartodikromo, 1919). Indonesian literary studies similarly identify code-mixing and code-switching as mechanisms through which institutional, social, and cultural meanings become embedded in narrative language (Dewi & Tustiawati, 2024; Riska et al., 2024). The cultural negotiation represented in these novels therefore emerges through encounters between linguistic resources associated with local communities and those associated with colonial institutions (Orsini, 2023b).

Kinship, status, and honorific relations constitute 16 episodes and provide another important site for cultural negotiation. Honorifics are particularly significant because their interpretation depends on culturally specific systems of hierarchy, respect, age, affiliation, and interpersonal distance (Myers-Scotton, 1993). The relatively high frequency of this domain corresponds with the structural prominence of honorific and title insertion identified in Table 3. In *Sitti Nurbaya*, Minangkabau titles retain culturally embedded systems of address within the broader Malay or Indonesian narrative matrix (Rusli, 1922). Comparable forms of socially marked address in *Kim* and *A Passage to India* establish relationships among characters whose identities are shaped by different cultural and institutional affiliations (Kipling, 1901; Forster, 1924). Literary multilingualism research emphasizes that such linguistic markers can make cultural difference legible without requiring extended passages in another language (Grutman, 2024). The persistence of these forms demonstrates

that cultural negotiation often occurs through highly localized linguistic choices that condense broader systems of social knowledge into individual words or expressions.

Table 6. Cultural Domains Represented by Multilingual Episodes

Cultural Domain	<i>Sitti Nurbaya</i>	<i>Student Hidjo</i>	<i>Kim</i>	<i>A Passage to India</i>	Total	Share
Governance/institution	6	7	4	6	23	28.7%
Kinship/status/honorific	6	3	4	3	16	20.0%
Religion/ritual	2	0	4	3	9	11.2%
Education/modernity	2	4	2	1	9	11.2%
Everyday material culture	2	3	3	3	11	13.8%
Place/mobility	2	3	3	4	12	15.0%

Table 6 demonstrates that the cultural domains are distributed unevenly across the four novels, revealing different emphases in the representation of multilingual experience (Orsini, 2023b). Governance and institutional language is particularly prominent in *Student Hidjo*, where seven of the twenty episodes belong to this category (Kartodikromo, 1919). *Sitti Nurbaya* records six governance or institutional episodes and six kinship, status, or honorific episodes, producing a strong relationship between colonial institutions and local social structures (Rusli, 1922). The Anglo-Indian novels display greater representation of religion and ritual, with four episodes in *Kim* and three in *A Passage to India* (Kipling, 1901; Forster, 1924). The difference suggests that the two colonial literary contexts organize cultural negotiation through partially different combinations of institutional, social, religious, and spatial resources (Orsini, 2023a). Indonesian literary research likewise shows that multilingual forms can preserve culturally specific references while functioning within a dominant narrative language (Sofyaningrum et al., 2023). The findings therefore indicate that multilingualism participates in cultural negotiation by determining which social domains become linguistically marked and how those domains are made accessible to readers.

Reader accommodation constitutes a second dimension of cultural negotiation because multilingual narratives must position readers in relation to expressions that may or may not be immediately intelligible (Grutman, 2023). Across the corpus, 31 of the 80 episodes contain no gloss or explicit explanation, making reader inference the most frequent accommodation strategy at 38.8% (Grutman, 2023). Narrative or metalinguistic explanation accounts for 17 episodes, while contextual paraphrase appears in 16 episodes (Ala-Risku, 2024). Immediate translation or gloss occurs in ten episodes, and repetition or parallel expression appears in six episodes, demonstrating that the novels employ several degrees of interpretive assistance (Baldo & Deganutti, 2024). The coexistence of explanation and non-explanation indicates that multilingual texts do not follow a single principle of accessibility for culturally marked expressions (Van Dijk, 2024). Reader accommodation instead becomes part of the narrative design because the decision to explain, translate, repeat, or leave an expression unresolved affects how linguistic difference is experienced during reading (Mole, 2024).

Table 7. Reader Accommodation Strategies by Work

Reader accommodation	<i>Sitti Nurbaya</i>	<i>Student Hidjo</i>	<i>Kim</i>	<i>A Passage to India</i>	Total	Share
Immediate translation/gloss	2	5	2	1	10	12.5%
Contextual paraphrase	5	3	4	4	16	20.0%
Narrative/metalinguistic explanation	4	4	5	4	17	21.2%
Repetition/parallel expression	2	2	1	1	6	7.5%
No gloss/reader inference	7	6	8	10	31	38.8%
Total	20	20	20	20	80	100.0%

Table 7 shows that the four novels differ in the degree to which they explicitly facilitate reader comprehension of multilingual expressions (Grutman, 2023). *A Passage to India* contains ten

episodes involving no gloss or reader inference, representing the highest count among the four works (Forster, 1924). *Kim* contains eight such episodes, while *Sitti Nurbaya* and *Student Hidjo* contain seven and six respectively (Kipling, 1901; Rusli, 1922; Kartodikromo, 1919). *Student Hidjo* records five cases of immediate translation or gloss, indicating a comparatively stronger tendency to resolve linguistic difference explicitly in selected contexts (Kartodikromo, 1919). The pattern is compatible with research showing that literary multilingualism can deliberately manipulate the degree of information available to readers rather than treating comprehension as an automatic requirement (Grutman, 2023). Metalinguistic explanation can also make readers conscious of the linguistic process itself, transforming interpretation into part of the narrative experience (Ala-Risku, 2024). Reader accommodation consequently functions not only as a strategy for comprehension but also as a mechanism for controlling the visibility and interpretive difficulty of cultural difference.

The prevalence of no-gloss episodes is particularly significant because the absence of translation does not necessarily indicate communicative failure. Leaving a multilingual expression unexplained can normalize the represented linguistic repertoire by assuming that its meaning is available through context or shared cultural knowledge (Grutman, 2023). It can also create a controlled degree of estrangement in which readers encounter cultural meanings without receiving an immediate interpretive solution (Mole, 2024). The opposite strategy, immediate translation or gloss, explicitly establishes a bridge between linguistic repertoires and can position the reader as an outsider requiring assistance (Van Dijk, 2024). Contextual paraphrase and narrative explanation occupy an intermediate position because they provide interpretive support without necessarily replacing the marked expression with an equivalent monolingual form (Baldo & Deganutti, 2024). Research on translanguaging further suggests that multilingual meaning can emerge from the interaction of linguistic resources and contextual interpretation rather than from direct word-for-word equivalence (García & Li, 2014). The alternation among these strategies demonstrates that reader accommodation is itself a form of cultural negotiation in which the narrative regulates how much linguistic and cultural distance readers must traverse.

The comparison between cultural domains and accommodation strategies reveals that multilingual literary representation involves both the selection of cultural content and the management of reader access to that content. Governance, kinship, religion, education, material culture, and mobility are not merely thematic categories because their linguistic marking determines which cultural knowledge becomes salient within the narrative (Orsini, 2023b). The strong representation of institutional and status-related domains in the Indonesian novels places colonial administration and local social organization in sustained linguistic contact (Orsini, 2023a). The stronger representation of religion and place-related cultural domains in the Anglo-Indian novels highlights other dimensions of colonial cultural encounter without eliminating institutional language from the corpus (Kipling, 1901; Forster, 1924). Reader accommodation then mediates these differences by determining whether culturally marked expressions are translated, contextualized, explained, repeated, or left for readers to infer (Grutman, 2023). Multilingual texts construct audiences through choices concerning explanation, translation, linguistic visibility, and interpretive participation (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2023). Cultural negotiation in the corpus therefore operates simultaneously at the level of represented social domains and at the level of reader positioning, making multilingual form an active mechanism for organizing both cultural difference and interpretive access.

Cross-Corpus Comparative Patterns

The cross-corpus comparison shows that the Indonesian and Anglo-Indian groups share several structural tendencies while differing in the cultural domains through which multilingualism becomes narratively meaningful. Both groups contain a substantial proportion of embedded lexical items, with 14 episodes in the Indonesian corpus and 16 in the Anglo-Indian corpus. Honorific or title insertion is also relatively balanced, accounting for 11 Indonesian episodes and 10 Anglo-Indian episodes. These similarities indicate that multilingual literary construction in both colonial contexts frequently operates through localized linguistic markers rather than sustained language alternation. Research on literary multilingualism likewise identifies lexical incorporation and socially marked linguistic forms as important mechanisms for integrating linguistic difference into dominant-language narratives (Gardner-Chloros & Weston, 2015). The comparable structural distribution suggests that

multilingual narrative techniques can emerge across different imperial settings without requiring identical historical or linguistic conditions.

Table 8. Comparative Profile of Multilingual Patterns by Corpus

Pattern	Indonesian Corpus	Anglo-Indian Corpus
Embedded lexical items	14 (35.0%)	16 (40.0%)
Honorific/title insertion	11 (27.5%)	10 (25.0%)
Colonial status/power	12 (30.0%)	12 (30.0%)
Education/cosmopolitan mobility	7 (17.5%)	3 (7.5%)
Religious/communal affiliation	2 (5.0%)	6 (15.0%)

Table 8 indicates that the two corpora converge most clearly in their representation of colonial status or power, with each group containing 12 episodes or 30.0% of its respective sample. The equal proportion suggests that multilingual language choice is consistently associated with hierarchical relations across both colonial literary environments. The Indonesian corpus contains a higher proportion of education and cosmopolitan mobility, with seven episodes compared with three in the Anglo-Indian corpus. This difference corresponds with the role of education, travel, and institutional advancement in Indonesian colonial narratives, particularly in *Student Hidjo* (Kartodikromo, 1919). Indonesian literary research similarly demonstrates that code-switching and code-mixing can become resources for representing social mobility and character positioning within culturally specific contexts (Pratama et al., 2025). The Anglo-Indian corpus, by contrast, contains a higher proportion of religious or communal affiliation, with six episodes compared with two in the Indonesian group. This pattern is consistent with scholarship emphasizing the relationship between multilingual practice, cultural affiliation, and community identity in literary narratives (Hamamra et al., 2025).

The difference in reader accommodation provides another significant distinction between the two corpora. No-gloss or reader-inference episodes account for 13 cases in the Indonesian corpus but 18 cases in the Anglo-Indian corpus. The higher Anglo-Indian proportion indicates that *Kim* and *A Passage to India* more frequently allow culturally marked expressions to remain interpretable through contextual or reader-based inference (Kipling, 1901; Forster, 1924). Such a strategy can reduce the need for explicit translation while simultaneously requiring readers to engage with linguistic and cultural information that is not fully resolved within the text (Grutman, 2023). The Indonesian corpus contains a comparatively stronger orientation toward institutional language, with 13 governance or institutional episodes compared with 10 in the Anglo-Indian group. This pattern suggests that the Indonesian novels more frequently locate multilingual negotiation within administrative and institutional encounters (Rusli, 1922; Kartodikromo, 1919). Studies of Indonesian fiction similarly identify multilingual forms as mechanisms for representing social relations, institutional environments, and culturally specific identities (Habibah et al., 2024; Riska et al., 2024). Reader accommodation therefore differs alongside cultural domain, indicating that the two corpora organize linguistic accessibility through somewhat different narrative environments.

The structural comparison becomes more informative when multilingual forms are cross-tabulated with their identity functions. Embedded lexical items are distributed across all six identity categories, demonstrating that their formal simplicity does not restrict their interpretive function. Honorific and title insertions similarly extend across colonial status, cultural belonging, solidarity, education, religion, and resistance, although their strongest association is with colonial power and cultural belonging. Phrase or clause switches are less frequent overall but display a comparatively greater association with education or mobility and resistance or boundary marking. Metalinguistic naming or glossing occurs particularly in relation to education or mobility, suggesting that explicit attention to linguistic difference can accompany moments of cultural or institutional transition. Research on literary code-switching demonstrates that linguistic alternation can articulate social identity through multiple simultaneous functions rather than through a fixed relationship between form and meaning (Qayyum et al., 2024). The distribution therefore indicates that structural form alone cannot determine the identity function of a multilingual episode.

Table 9. Structural Form × Identity Function

Structural Form	Colonial Power	Cultural Belonging	Solidarity	Education/Mobility	Religion/Community	Resistance/Boundary	Total
Embedded lexical item	8	8	4	3	3	4	30
Honorific/title insertion	6	5	3	1	3	3	21
Phrase/clause switch	2	1	1	2	0	2	8
Metalinguistic naming/gloss	3	2	1	4	1	1	12
Stylized other-language speech	5	1	0	0	1	2	9
Total	24	17	9	10	8	12	80

Table 9 demonstrates that embedded lexical items constitute the most versatile structural category, with occurrences across every identity function. Eight of the 30 embedded lexical episodes are associated with colonial power, while another eight are associated with cultural belonging. Honorific or title insertion shows a similar but more socially concentrated pattern, with six episodes connected to colonial power and five to cultural belonging. Stylized other-language speech is particularly associated with colonial power, accounting for five of its nine occurrences. The concentration suggests that represented speech can make linguistic difference more visible when narratives depict unequal social relations or encounters with culturally differentiated communities (Claros, 2024). Research on code-switching in diasporic and multilingual fiction likewise indicates that stylized linguistic choices can articulate boundaries between identities while simultaneously negotiating belonging (Purnawati et al., 2025). The cross-tabulation therefore confirms that multilingual structure and identity function are related but not deterministically connected, because the same formal device can perform different social meanings according to narrative context.

The comparative findings also demonstrate that multilingual literary identity is produced through overlapping processes of affiliation, differentiation, mobility, and negotiation. The Indonesian corpus places comparatively greater emphasis on education and cosmopolitan mobility, whereas the Anglo-Indian corpus gives greater representation to religious and communal affiliation. These differences do not establish separate models of multilingualism because both corpora repeatedly connect language choice with colonial status or power. The shared prominence of colonial power indicates that multilingual practices remain closely connected to the social organization of colonial encounters in both groups. At the same time, the different distributions of cultural domains demonstrate that colonial multilingualism is mediated by local histories, institutions, communities, and narrative priorities (Orsini, 2023b). Research on translanguaging emphasizes that linguistic resources can be mobilized fluidly across cultural and social boundaries, allowing identity to remain multiple rather than linguistically fixed (García & Li, 2014). Similar patterns appear in studies of immigrant and diasporic fiction, where translanguaging and code-switching provide resources for self-identification and negotiation between overlapping cultural positions (Protassova & Yelenevskaya, 2024).

Taken together, the cross-corpus evidence identifies three interconnected operations of multilingual narrative form: the classification of social relations, the positioning of cultural identities, and the regulation of reader access to linguistic difference. Colonial status or power represents the most frequent identity function, while governance and institutional contexts constitute the most frequent cultural domain across the complete corpus. The predominance of embedded lexical items demonstrates that these functions can be activated through relatively small linguistic units rather than through extended passages of language alternation. The substantial proportion of no-gloss episodes further indicates that multilingual narratives can require readers to participate actively in constructing cultural meaning rather than receiving every expression through translation or explanation (Grutman, 2023). The findings correspond with research showing that literary multilingualism can operate simultaneously as an aesthetic practice, an identity resource, and a mode of cultural representation

(Baldo, 2024). The comparison also extends observations from Indonesian literary studies, where code-mixing and code-switching have been shown to encode cultural identity and social positioning within contemporary fiction (Utami & Markamah, 2023; Saputra & Sofa, 2026). Multilingualism in the four novels can therefore be understood as a narrative system in which linguistic form, identity positioning, cultural domains, and reader accommodation interact rather than function as isolated textual features.

CONCLUSION

Multilingualism in the four colonial-era narratives operates as a structured mechanism through which language, identity, and cultural negotiation are interconnected. The analysis of 80 balanced multilingual episodes demonstrates that embedded lexical items and honorific or title insertions constitute the most frequent structural forms, although their narrative functions extend across colonial status, cultural belonging, solidarity, education and mobility, religion, and resistance. Colonial status or power emerges as the most frequent identity function in both the Indonesian and Anglo-Indian corpora, indicating the persistent relationship between linguistic choice and hierarchical social structures within colonial narrative worlds. The Indonesian narratives show a stronger association between multilingualism, education, and cosmopolitan mobility, whereas the Anglo-Indian narratives contain a greater concentration of religious and communal affiliation. These differences demonstrate that multilingual forms cannot be interpreted independently of the institutional structures, cultural repertoires, and social relations represented within each narrative. The findings support a translingual understanding of literary language in which linguistic resources are mobilized across cultural and social boundaries rather than functioning as isolated, autonomous codes (Canagarajah, 2013). Multilingualism consequently operates not simply as a stylistic feature but as a narrative mechanism for positioning characters within intersecting systems of power, belonging, mobility, and cultural affiliation.

Reader accommodation forms an equally important component of this multilingual narrative process because the treatment of marked expressions determines how readers encounter cultural and linguistic difference. The finding that 31 of 80 episodes, or 38.8%, contain no gloss or explicit explanation demonstrates that reader inference is the most frequent accommodation strategy in the corpus. This pattern indicates that multilingual literary texts can preserve linguistic and cultural opacity rather than consistently translating marked expressions into immediately accessible equivalents. The study is limited by its purposive and balanced sample of 80 episodes and by the historical specificity of four colonial-era novels, so the reported frequencies should not be generalized to complete national literary traditions. Future research can extend the coding framework to larger digitized corpora, contemporary Indonesian fiction, translation pairs, and empirical reader-response data. Within the present corpus, however, multilingual language emerges as a narrative distribution of social knowledge that marks who can speak, who can move, who belongs, which institutions possess linguistic authority, and how much cultural difference remains for readers to interpret (Grutman, 2023). The findings therefore position literary multilingualism as an active interface between linguistic form, identity construction, cultural negotiation, and reader participation.

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