

Translingual practice in Indonesian popular song lyric writing: Creative multilingualism

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ABSTRACT

The multilingual turn in sociolinguistics has repositioned language as a dynamic social practice enacted across diverse settings, including second language education and non-educational creative domains. While translingual practices in educational contexts have received considerable scholarly attention, their manifestation in creative arts, particularly popular music, remains an underexplored area of inquiry. This study examines how Indonesian popular song lyricists employ diverse linguistic repertoires in their music. Ten bilingual (Indonesian–English) songs released between 2001 and 2021 were purposively selected based on genre diversity, release date, and cultural popularity. The songs were analysed through van Dijk's (2014) Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA), employing macro-, super-, and microstructural frameworks to examine their thematic content, translingual elements, lexical choices, and stylistic features. A structured perception survey administered to 67 audience members with varied demographic backgrounds was used to triangulate textual findings with audience reception data. The findings indicate that (1) love and romance are the dominant themes across the corpus, consistent with patterns in monolingual popular music; (2) translingual elements appear most frequently in the refrain or chorus section, signaling deliberate message emphasis by the writers; and (3) the socio-political freedoms of the post-New Order era appear to have contributed to greater artistic and linguistic experimentation in Indonesian popular music.

Keywords: Creative multilingualism; Indonesian popular music; socio-cognitive approach; song lyric writing; translingual practice

Received:
20 Februari 2026

Accepted:
14 May 2026

Revised:
14 April 2026

Published:
31 May 2026

How to cite (in APA style):

Liliani, E., Machfauzia, A. N., & Ashadi. (2026). Translingual practice in Indonesian popular song lyric writing: Creative multilingualism. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 16(1), 198-208. <https://doi.org/10.17509/kkzdez38>

INTRODUCTION

Socio-cultural communication reflects how individuals interact within specific social and cultural contexts, shaped by shared norms, values, beliefs, and identities (Martin & Nakayama, 2021). In parallel, rhetorical communication emphasises the strategic use of language and persuasion through argumentation, ethos, pathos, and logos (Foss et al., 2014; O'Hair et al., 2020). Both dimensions are not merely theoretical constructs. They operate simultaneously in everyday communicative practice, including in creative domains such as popular music. Understanding how these two modes of

communication converge in song lyrics thus offers a productive entry point for examining language as both a social and persuasive act.

Song lyrics constitute a site where socio-cultural and rhetorical forces are actively negotiated. The lyrics of a song may reflect the norms, values, and beliefs of a specific social group, as well as individual and collective identities (Wang, 2021), while simultaneously employing rhetorical devices to shape the listener's emotional responses or prompt particular orientations toward the world (Selzer, 2003). The expressions, melodies, and visual representations in a creative work tend to

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align with the societal, economic, and cultural beliefs of a particular region (Obono, 2018), suggesting that artistic production is never culturally neutral but is always embedded in prevailing sociodemographic conditions.

Scholarly attention to the linguistic and structural dimensions of song lyrics has grown considerably over the past two decades, constituting a recognisable body of knowledge on which the present study builds. Studies have demonstrated that the arrangement of lyrical elements constructs narrative coherence and amplifies emotional impact (Baker & Wigram, 2005; Schotanus, 2020). Huron (2015) argues that lyrics play a critical role in a song's overall aesthetic and emotional impact, working in tandem with melody through what Zbikowski (2009) terms the text-music relationship. At the structural level, Astor and Negus (2016) establish that lyrics possess an existence independent of any single performance or transcription, while Nobile (2022) proposes that the verse-chorus form is best understood as a teleological journey, wherein structure serves direction and purpose rather than convention alone. The functions of the intro further reinforce the song's structure, refrain, and coda, each of which carries a specific communicative logic within the song's overall architecture (Seifert & Rentzsch, 2008).

Beyond structure, a parallel line of inquiry has examined the semiotics of lyrical meaning-making and the role of language choice in popular music. Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012) establish that semiotics offers a productive lens for analysing signs and symbols in media content, including music. The choice to shift language repertoire in song lyrics is aimed at producing a specific communicative or ideological effect. Aleshinskaya and Gritsenko (2017) demonstrate that language-switching in song lyrics serves to construct identity at ethnic, local, and transnational levels. Creative multilingualism does not operate in a neutral space but within unequal sociolinguistic conditions shaped by history, power, and access.

These findings have been extended in recent years to diverse national and regional contexts. In African popular music, Banda (2019) shows that multilingual practices bring into dialogue the traditional and the modern, the rural and the urban, constructing fluid ethnic identities while simultaneously navigating unequal power relations between local and global musical traditions. In the K-pop industry, scholars have examined how English-Korean code-switching serves as a strategy to simultaneously address domestic and international audiences, with language choice calibrated to the target market (Jin & Ryoo, 2014). Across these varied contexts, a consistent finding emerges. Translingual songwriting is not merely a reflection of its creators' linguistic repertoires, but a

deliberate discursive practice through which artists negotiate identity, reach audiences, and position themselves within broader cultural and commercial landscapes.

In contemporary Indonesian popular music, this negotiation takes a particularly complex form. Lyric writing frequently involves a combination of two or more languages reflecting the country's postcolonial linguistic ecology and its integration into global popular culture networks. Given limited systematic data, Batu and Sukanto (2020) suggested that translingual songwriting in Indonesia may convey cultural messages, create meaning, and attract wider popularity. The significance of this practice extends beyond national boundaries: as an instance of translingual creativity in a major multilingual country navigating tensions between local identity, national language policy, and global popular culture, it offers insights of broader relevance to applied linguistics, cultural studies, and scholarship on multilingualism.

Despite the substantial body of research on translanguaging and multilingual creativity reviewed above, a clear and consequential gap remains. Existing studies either address translanguaging in educational or institutional contexts or examine multilingual lyrics in settings outside Indonesia. No study to date has applied a systematic socio-cognitive analytical framework to examine how Indonesian songwriters construct, arrange, and motivate their translingual lyrical choices. The distinctive negotiation of Javanese, Indonesian, and English repertoires within the post-New Order reform era has thus remained largely unexamined in the scholarly literature.

This study directly addresses that gap. The study's novelty lies in its application of SCA to creative multilingualism in a postcolonial context, its integration of structural discourse analysis with audience reception data, and its situating of Indonesian popular music within specific socio-historical conditions. The study is guided by three research questions: (1) What common themes do lyric writers raise in their translingual songs? (2) How do these writers arrange translingual elements within the song composition? (3) What communicative purposes are served by the arrangement of translingual lyrics? The answers to these questions are expected to enrich scholarly understanding of the relationship between aesthetic strategy, identity construction, and creative expression in multilingual societies.

METHOD

This study employed van Dijk's (2014) Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA), which examines discourse through "*the mental representations of language users as individuals and as social members*" (p. 64). SCA enables (1) the tracking and

mapping of cognitive frameworks, including views, beliefs, and preconceptions through which individuals create and interpret discourse, and (2) the elaboration of how these cognitive frameworks determine discourse structures and their interpretation in specific communicative situations. Applied to song lyrics, SCA allows for the investigation of both the textual features of translingual songwriting and the cognitive and social meanings these features carry.

Song Selection Criteria and Sample

Ten bilingual (Indonesian–English) songs constituted the primary dataset, as displayed in

Table 1. Songs were purposively selected based on three explicit criteria: (a) genre diversity, ensuring representation of pop, rock, and dangdut; (b) temporal range, with songs spanning from 2001 to 2021 to capture the translingual practice across two decades of post-reform music production; and (c) cultural prominence, all selected songs achieved documented commercial success (chart performance, award recognition, or sustained streaming presence) within their genre communities at or following the time of release, ensuring that the data reflect mainstream creative choices rather than marginal or experimental output.

Table 1

Sample of the Song Lyrics

No.	Title	Writer(s)	Year
1.	<i>I missed you but I hate you (IMbIH)</i>	Slank	2002
2.	<i>Manusia sempurna (MS)</i>	Giring (Nidji)	2006
3.	<i>Dangdut is the music of my country (DiTMC)</i>	Yosi (Project Pop)	2003
4.	<i>Let's dance together (LDT)</i>	Melly Goeslow feat BBB	2007
5.	<i>My heart (MH)</i>	Acha Septriasa & Irwansyah	2006
6.	<i>Paralysed (PL)</i>	Agnez Monica	2011
7.	<i>Could it be (CIB)</i>	Adrianto Ario Seto, Astono Handoko, Raisa Andriana, & Ramadhan Handyanto Jiwatama	2011
8.	<i>Everybody knew (EK)</i>	Agus Setiawan	2013
9.	<i>Never leave ya (NLY)</i>	Harry Sommerdahl Alexander, James G. Tapiheru, & A. Tapiheru, Abigail	2015
10.	<i>Holiday (HY)</i>	Yonanda Frisna Damara	2021

Critically, all selected songs were produced after 1998 (the post-reform era), ensuring that the corpus reflects the artistic and political freedoms. The sample thus allows for thick description of translingual phenomena across genres, periods, and contexts within the Indonesian post-reform cultural landscape.

Discourse Structure Analysis and Coding Procedure

The analytical framework followed van Dijk's (2014) three-level discourse structure model,

summarised in Table 2. At the macrostructural level, the analysis identified the overarching theme of each song by examining the most frequently recurring lexical items and their semantic fields. At the superstructural (schematic) level, the generic organisation of each song was mapped, identifying patterns in the sequencing of structural sections. At the microstructural level, specific lexical choices were examined, with attention to the locus and form of translingual elements (code-switching and code-mixing) across structural sections.

Table 2

Elements of Discourse Structure

Discourse Structure	Observed Matters	Elements	Excerpts (from the data)
Macrostructure	Themes	Topic	Love, nationalism, leisure
Superstructure	Schematic	Generic structure	Intro, verse, chorus, coda
Microstructure	Stylistics	Lexicon	Frequently appearing translingual words

Coding was conducted deductively, guided by the three structural levels. Each song was first segmented into its structural sections (intro, verse, chorus/refrain, coda). Within each section, every word was coded by language of origin: Indonesian (I), English (E), or regional vernacular (V). The frequency and distribution of translingual elements across structural sections were then tabulated, enabling the identification of patterned placement of multilingual elements. To enhance coding reliability, two independent raters coded a subset of 3 songs; discrepancies were discussed and resolved

by consensus before finalising coding of the full corpus.

Audience Perception Survey

A structured audience perception survey was administered to 67 participants in the Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Participants were Indonesian residents with varying levels of English proficiency and represented diverse age cohorts, genders, and occupational backgrounds. Table 3 summarises the demographic profile of the participant sample, and Table 4 lists the survey items.

Table 3

Demographic Profile of Survey Participants (N = 67)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Perempuan (Female)	34	50.7%
	Laki-laki (Male)	33	49.3%
Age Group	< 13 years (Children)	3	4.5%
	13–17 years (Adolescents)	18	26.9%
	18–25 years (Young Adults)	10	14.9%
	26–35 years (Adults)	11	16.4%
	36–50 years (Middle-aged)	21	31.3%
	> 50 years (Older Adults)	4	6.0%
Occupational Status	Secondary student	25	37.3%
	Professional workers	31	46.3%
	Entrepreneur	1	1.5%
	Others	10	14.9%
English Proficiency (1–5)	1 – Very Limited	6	9.0%
	2 – Limited	22	32.8%
	3 – Moderate	33	49.3%
	4 – Proficient	5	7.5%
	5 – Very Proficient	1	1.5%

Note. English proficiency was self-assessed on a five-point scale (1 = Very Limited; 5 = Very Proficient)

Table 4

Survey Items: Questions and Item Types

Item	Survey Question (Indonesian / English)	Item Type
Q1	<i>Lagu mana yang pernah anda dengar sebelumnya?</i> / Which of the following songs have you heard before?	Multiple choice (multi-select)
Q2	<i>Apa yang anda rasakan saat mendengarkan lirik lagu yang dwi-bahasa?</i> / What do you feel when listening to bilingual song lyrics?	Multiple choice (multi-select)
Q3	<i>Menurut anda apakah alasan penulis lagu menuliskan lirik dalam 2 bahasa?</i> / In your view, why do lyric writers use two languages?	Multiple choice (multi-select)
Q4	<i>Menurut anda, apakah lagu-lagu tersebut memang menjadi lebih bagus saat ditulis dalam dwi-bahasa?</i> / Do you think the songs are better in bilingual form?	Multiple choice (single choice)
Q5	<i>Apa kelebihan lagu dwi-bahasa menurut anda?</i> / What are the advantages of bilingual songs?	Open-ended
Q6	<i>Jika ada, apa kekurangan lagu dwi-bahasa menurut anda?</i> / What are the disadvantages, if any?	Open-ended
Q7	<i>Menurut anda, lagu dwi-bahasa ini merepresentasikan.....</i> / In your opinion, bilingual songs represent	Multiple choice (multi-select)

The survey was administered digitally via Google Forms and distributed through social media networks and direct invitation. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. All participants were informed that the survey concerned their perceptions of Indonesian popular songs containing mixed Indonesian–English lyrics, and that the data would be used for academic research purposes only. No personally identifying information beyond a self-chosen nickname was collected.

Two specific analytical procedures require further elaboration. For the thematic analysis, coding proceeded deductively from candidate theme categories derived from the literature on translingual popular music (Pennycook, 2006; Canagarajah, 2013), before being refined inductively through repeated engagement with the corpus. Themes were confirmed only when they appeared across multiple songs and could be grounded in specific lexical and semantic evidence in the lyrics.

For the audience survey analysis, closed-ended items (Q1–Q4, Q7) were analysed through

descriptive frequency statistics (response counts and percentages). Open-ended items (Q5 and Q6) were analysed using inductive thematic categorisation. Responses were read in full, recurring themes were identified and labelled, and representative verbatim responses were selected as illustrative examples in the Findings. Survey findings were not treated as a standalone audience study but rather as triangulating evidence used to corroborate, contextualise, or qualify the interpretations derived from the textual analysis. It should be noted that the survey data support inferences about audience perception and reception, not about songwriter intention.

FINDINGS

Inside the Text: Themes, Structures, and Translingual Choices

Macrostructurally, the analysis of the most frequently recurring lexical items across the corpus reveals that most songs converge on the theme of *love and romance*, with two notable exceptions:

DiTMC, which addresses *nationalism and cultural pride*, and HY, which focuses on *leisure and social commentary*. Table 5 presents the most distinctive high-frequency words for each song.

Translingual songwriters express universal interpersonal themes like monolinguals, but their linguistic diversity carries meaning.

Table 5
Most Frequent Distinctive Words in the Corpus

Song	Most Frequent Distinctive Words
IMbIH	miss (11), hate (10), girl (10), nggak (9), tahu (5)
MS	angel (6), walks (2), untukku (2), terbanglah (2), talks (2)
DiTMC	country (26), orang (10), dangdut (9), music (12), aaaaa (5)
LDT	dance (28), let's (21), party (13), turn (7), stand (7)
MH	love (8), sayang (4), heart (4), yang (3), tegar (3)
PL	paralysed (16), boy (8), gonna (13), won't (3), show (3)
CIB	love (27), pertama (3), jumpa (3), tingkahmu (2), tertawa (2)
EK	knew (17), everybody (17), you're (17), liar (7), player (6)
NLY	leave (50), ya (25), work (12), believe (12), gonna (19)
HY	way (8), okay (8), holiday (8), follow (8), fly (8)

As displayed in Table 5, the dominant words in each song consistently point toward interpersonal emotional themes. English-language words such as *miss*, *hate*, *love*, *heart*, and *paralysed* appear alongside Indonesian-language words such as *sayang* (love/affection), *tegar* (resilient/steadfast), and *nggak* (colloquial negation), demonstrating the bilingual construction of thematic content. The concentration of high-frequency English love-related words in several songs suggests that English functions as the primary language of intensified emotional expression in these lyrics. This finding is consistent with Aleshinskaya and Gritsenko's (2017) observation that language switching in popular music can be used to construct specific emotional and cultural registers.

Diverging from romantic themes, DiTMC asserts cultural identity through frequent references to 'country' (26 occurrences) and 'dangdut' (9 occurrences), proving that translingual practice also

serves ideological and nationalist purposes. HY diverges by pairing the satirically charged Indonesian term *jomblo* with English holiday vocabulary. This fusion illustrates how local songwriters bridge global themes with regional social critique, a hallmark of Indonesian translingualism. These thematic variations indicate that while love is the dominant topic, translingual practice in Indonesian popular music serves a range of communicative and cultural purposes.

Translingual Elements: The Superstructural Analysis

The superstructural analysis examined where, within each song's generic structure, translingual elements appear. Table 6 maps the locus of translingual elements across the structural sections (intro, verse, chorus/refrain, and coda) for each song in the corpus.

Table 6
The Locus of Translingual Elements across Structural Sections

Musical Section	MH	NLY	CIB	EK	PL	IMbIH	HY	DiTMC	LDT	MS
Intro	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Verse	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chorus / Refrain	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	-
Coda / Outro	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	√

Note. √ = translingual elements present; - = translingual elements absent.

As shown in Table 6, nine of the ten songs concentrate their translingual (English-language) elements in the chorus/refrain section. This placement is strategically significant. As the musical and emotional apex of a track, the chorus is designed to house the primary theme and the most memorable 'hooks' (Seifert & Rentzsch, 2008). By anchoring translingual lyrics in this structurally privileged space, songwriters aren't just making a stylistic choice; they are using multilingual resources to amplify their central message at the moment of maximum impact, signalling an intentional outreach to audiences far beyond

Indonesia's borders. This structural pattern is clearly evident in the most frequently repeated lines of two representative songs in the corpus.

I miss you but I hate you, my girl [repeated twice] (IMbIH)

Dangdut is the music of my country [repeated six times] (DiTMC)

The repetition of these translingual refrains serves a dual compositional function. First, to articulate the song's primary message. Second, to re-emphasise that message through musical and

linguistic repetition. As Schotanus (2020) demonstrates, repetition in song lyrics creates familiarity and deepens the listener's emotional connection to the song, amplifying its impact. The deliberate use of English in these repeated, structurally prominent moments thus combines message emphasis with the emotional reinforcement of repetition.

Negus and Astor (2015) view songwriters as architects who design a 'structural logic' intended to resonate subconsciously with the listener. This architectural awareness is most striking when translingual elements are placed at a song's structural apex. This choice finds further grounding in Nobile's (2022) telos principle, which posits that the progression from verse to chorus is a goal-oriented journey rather than a simple sequence. By shifting to English at the chorus, songwriters effectively enact this telos, marking the transition as the arrival at the song's ultimate emotional and thematic destination.

The one deviation from this pattern, MS, places its translingual elements in the coda/outro rather than the chorus. This constitutes a deliberate structural deviation, a divergence from anticipated linguistic patterns intended to elicit surprise and redirect listener attention in the song's closing section (Lebedeva & Lupacheva, 2019). The English-language coda of MS reads:

Angel walks, angel talks / Angel sings and brings / Angel walks, angel talks / Angel sings (MS)

The coda of MS employs a 'backgrounding' technique, intentionally tapering off in intensity to guide the listener toward a sense of quiet closure. By softening the prominence of the lyrics, the outro creates space for the serene, almost ethereal imagery to take centre stage, a move that aligns with its traditional role as a site for emotional resolution (Negus & Astor, 2015). Here, the shift to English isn't meant to startle or emphasise. It functions aesthetically, allowing the transnational resonance of 'angelic' motifs to provide the song's final, lingering thematic note.

At a microstructural level, the specific linguistic shifts within MH reveal a deliberate strategy of audience engagement. The song opens with the phrase *aku dan kau* (I and you), immediately establishing a direct, declarative connection between singer and listener. This transition into the second section's interrogative *pernahkah* (have you ever?) moves the discourse from statement to inquiry, actively inviting the audience into the narrative. Such choices exemplify van Dijk's (2014) SCA framework, in which songwriting serves as a cognitive bridge, adapting style and word choice to meet the recipient's perceived relevance and knowledge.

The songwriting sampled here echoes Lebedeva and Lupacheva's (2019) assertion that

translingualism is a primary tool for communicating native identity. In these tracks, English is never a neutral medium. Instead, it functions as a 'marked' resource, signalling modernity and emotional depth. This mirrors de los Ríos's (2022) findings on how youth musicians forge new identities through multilingual innovation. Ultimately, as Werner (2019) suggests, this creative interplay does more than just entertain. It actively sharpens the linguistic awareness of both the creator and the listener.

The Communicative Purposes in the Arrangement of Translingual Lyrics

The survey results reveal a largely enthusiastic reception, with over 40% of participants feeling 'happy' (*senang*) when engaging with bilingual lyrics, and another 16.5% pairing that joy with a sense of pride or admiration. In contrast, only a marginal 1.5% found the experience alienating. This positive sentiment carries over to aesthetic judgment: a combined 76.1% of respondents believe these songs are better in their bilingual form.

Interestingly, audiences attribute these translingual choices to craft rather than commerce, prioritising effective message delivery and atmospheric alignment over artist branding. This audience perception mirrors our micro-level findings: English isn't just a stylistic add-on. It is a deliberate compositional tool anchored in the song's communicative core.

Participants' sociolinguistic positioning of bilingual songs was dispersed across three near-equal framings: individual artistic choice (47.8%), linguistic inevitability (44.8%), and a sign of globalisation (43.3%). Only 20.9% regarded it as a passing trend. The absence of a dominant consensus position indicates that Indonesian audiences hold no singular ideological stance on translingual lyric writing, but simultaneously recognise it as deliberate, historically conditioned, and globally situated. This is consistent with van Dijk's (2014) emphasis on the socio-cognitive complexity of discourse reception.

These audience perceptions are grounded in the socio-political conditions under which the songs were produced. All ten songs were released after 1998, following the collapse of Suharto's New Order regime, whose cultural project systematically denied expressive pluralism and regulated song content through ministerial decree (Kitley, 2000). The post-Reformasi dismantling of these constraints made English available as a creative resource for mainstream popular music, previously confined to elite or foreign registers. As Heryanto (2018) argues, post-reform identity politics in Indonesia encompasses articulations of "visions, aspirations, and commitments to solidarity". The translingual songs enact multilingual identity, making it simultaneously audible to local and global audiences.

DISCUSSION

Translingual Practice as a Deliberate Aesthetic Strategy

The macrostructural analysis established that love and romance constitute the dominant thematic domain across eight of the ten songs, evidenced by the high frequency of English emotional vocabulary ('love' appears 27 times in CIB and 8 times in MH, 'miss' and 'hate' appear 11 and 10 times respectively in IMbIH). These items do not appear uniformly throughout each song's structure. The superstructural analysis reveals that nine of the ten songs concentrate their English-language elements in the chorus/refrain. The chorus/refrain conveys the song's primary message, carries the highest musical and emotional intensity, and is repeated multiple times across the listening experience (Seifert & Rentzsch, 2008). The co-occurrence of thematic concentration and structural concentration in the same songs indicates that English is not selected arbitrarily or for surface-level stylistic effect. However, it is deployed at the precise compositional moment when the song's affective payload is at its most intense.

Negus and Astor (2015) conceptualise songwriters as architects of lasting qualities, arguing that the enduring structural logic of a song sustains its communicative power across renditions and recordings. The consistent placement of English at the structural apex of these songs embodies this architectural awareness. The translingual chorus is designed to be the element that persists in the listener's memory, precisely because it combines message salience with the cognitive novelty of the language switch. Nobile's (2022) *telos* principle reinforces the idea that the verse-chorus progression is goal-directed, representing a compositional journey toward the song's communicative destination. The translingual shift to English enacts this *telos*. It marks arrival at the song's intended emotional peak, using the register-value of English to signal that the discourse has moved from narrative (verse) to affective culmination (chorus). The repetition of translingual refrains further amplifies this effect. As Schotanus (2020) demonstrates, repetition in song lyrics creates familiarity and deepens emotional connection, so that each return to the English-language chorus reinforces both the central message and the listener's affective investment in it.

The diversity of genres (rock (IMbIH), pop (MH, CIB, NLY), R&B (P, Agnes Monica), and dangdut hip-hop (HY) in which this structural pattern appears shows that the chorus-English strategy is not a genre-specific convention but a widely adopted translingual compositional logic across Indonesian popular music. This finding extends Aleshinskaya and Gritsenko's (2017) observation that language switching in popular music constructs specific emotional and cultural

registers by showing that, in the Indonesian context, the construction of that register is systematically tied to the song's formal architecture.

The microstructural analysis provides further evidence. The opening phrase of MH, 'aku dan kau' (I and you), is foregrounded as the song's topical theme before the translingual shift to English in the chorus. The interrogative form 'pernahkah' (have you ever?) that opens the second section establishes cognitive engagement and invites the listener into the song's discourse before delivering the English-language emotional climax. These microstructural choices reflect van Dijk's (2014) observation that language users adapt their style and word selection to the perceived relevance and emotional stakes of what they are communicating. Indonesian anchors the relational and narrative ground, while English marks the affective peak. Lebedeva and Lupacheva (2019) similarly argue that translingual writers use language-switching not as a neutral substitution but as a semiotic resource for signalling cultural registers and identity positions, a characterisation that the microstructural evidence in this corpus confirms.

The single structural deviation (MS placing its translingual elements in the coda/outro rather than the chorus) does not undermine the broader pattern. However, it illustrates the creative flexibility with which the same underlying aesthetic logic can be applied to different compositional structures. MS's English-language coda (Angel walks, angel talks / Angel sings and brings) employs what Lebedeva and Lupacheva (2019) identify as a backgrounding technique. The outro progressively diminishes emphasis and redirects attention toward aesthetic closure, with the transnational imagery of the angelic figure providing emotional resolution. The shift to English in the coda thus serves a distinct but equally purposive function. A critical limitation applies here. The textual evidence is consistent with intentional design, but co-authorship dynamics, genre convention, and commercial influence may also have shaped individual decisions in ways that textual analysis alone cannot distinguish.

Thematic Diversity Within a Dominant Love Theme: Nationalism and Social Commentary

While love and romance constitute the dominant thematic macro-structure across the corpus, the two outliers (DiTMC and HY) are analytically significant precisely because they demonstrate that translingual lyric writing is not reducible to a single communicative purpose. DiTMC deploys translingual elements for an ideological purpose that is almost the inverse of romantic intensification. The English word *country* (26 occurrences) and the Indonesian genre label *dangdut* (9 occurrences) are placed in a comedic refrain that simultaneously parodies global popular music conventions and asserts the legitimacy and distinctiveness of

Indonesian musical culture. The irony of using English to proclaim that dangdut, a distinctively Indonesian genre, is 'the music of my country' is not incidental. It enacts what Pennycook (2006) describes as the creative appropriation of global English for local purposes, investing a borrowed language with a meaning that only makes full sense in the local cultural context.

HY operates at a different register of social commentary, embedding the colloquial Indonesian term 'jomblo' (a socially loaded word for an unmarried adult male, typically used with ironic self-deprecation) within an otherwise English-framed holiday refrain. This juxtaposition produces a translingual comic effect that is simultaneously globally legible (holiday as leisure aspiration) and locally meaningful (jomblo as social commentary on relationship status and social expectation). Kachru (1997) argued that such culturally specific appropriations of English should be recognised as legitimate creative expression rather than evaluated as deviations from standard norms. The HY example illustrates exactly the kind of bilingual creativity.

Audience Reception as Corroborating Evidence

The audience perception data provide external corroboration for the textual findings, while also introducing dimensions that the textual analysis alone could not access. The strongly positive evaluative stance of the survey participants (55.2% affirming that bilingual songs are better in bilingual form, and a further 20.9% considering this probably true, yielding a combined 76.1%) is consistent with the textual finding that English in these songs performs a structurally motivated intensifying function. The convergence between the textual analysis and the audience reception data strengthens the view that the translingual practice is a communicatively functional strategy that listeners recognise and value, even when they cannot always articulate the structural reasons for their positive response.

The distribution of perceived authorial motivations provides further convergence. The most frequently attributed reasons were effective message delivery (43.3%) and atmospheric alignment with the song's mood (37.3%), both of which are communicative and craft-related rather than commercial. International appeal ranked third (34.3%), followed by esthetic coolness (22.4%) and artist branding (17.9%). English elements serve affective, structural, indexical, and commercial functions. Audiences read the translingual choices in these songs primarily as decisions about how to say something most effectively, not primarily as decisions about how to be marketable. The fact that 47.8% of participants characterised bilingual songwriting as 'individual artistic choice' reinforces that Indonesian listeners perceive translingual

practice as expressive agency rather than structural determination or commercial mimicry.

The absence of a dominant consensus indicates that Indonesian audiences do not hold a univocal ideological stance on translingual lyric writing. They simultaneously recognise it as a personal creative decision, an historically conditioned linguistic development, and a marker of global cultural participation. This multiplicity is consistent with van Dijk's (2014) argument that discourse reception is cognitively complex and that the same text can activate different socio-cognitive models in different listeners depending on their knowledge, experience, and social position. The near-equal weight given to all three framings by the same pool of participants suggests that these models are not mutually exclusive but are co-activated in the reception of translingual music. It should be read as evidence of the genuine polysemy of translingual practice in the contemporary Indonesian cultural context.

Two important limitations qualify the survey findings. First, the survey instrument was drawn from a single regional network and cannot be considered representative of Indonesian popular music audiences nationwide. The perception data should therefore be treated as corroborating evidence that aligns with and enriches the textual findings, rather than as a standalone claim about national audience reception. Second, the survey design relied on closed multiple-choice items and two open-ended questions. It was not specifically designed to measure proficiency-related comprehension difficulty or differential access to translingual meaning. The instrument, therefore, likely underestimates the proportion of listeners who experience the translingual lyrics as partially inaccessible. The one verbatim response signalling alienation should be understood as indicative rather than quantitatively representative of this experience.

Socio-Historical Conditions and the Limits of Intentionality Claims

The socio-historical contextualisation establishes that the translingual practices identified in the textual analysis are not historically innocent. All ten songs were produced in the post-Reformasi era (1998 onward), a period marked by the opening of cultural space, a direct precondition for the sustained emergence of English-Indonesian mixing in mainstream popular music. Under Suharto's New Order (1966–1998), cultural production was subject to ministerial regulation that systematically suppressed linguistic and artistic pluralism and enforced Bahasa Indonesia as the exclusive register of public discourse (Kitley, 2000). The post-1998 dismantling of these regulatory structures did not simply permit translingual lyric writing. It created the cognitive and social conditions under which lyric writers could develop multilingual creative

repertoires, and audiences could form the shared cultural knowledge necessary to receive and value them. The concentration of translingual songs in particular genres (pop, rock, dangdut) and particular temporal moments (the mid-2000s wave represented by IMbIH, MH, and P; the later wave represented by CIB, NLY, and HY) reflects the uneven but cumulative development of this expanded creative space across two decades of post-reform cultural production.

Heryanto (2018) argues that post-reform identity politics in Indonesia encompasses articulations of “visions, aspirations, and commitments to solidarity” functions. The translingual corpus here enacts, at the level of lyric writing, multilingual identity as simultaneously audible to local and global audiences. This socio-historical grounding is analytically important because it situates the study’s findings within a specific historical trajectory rather than presenting translingual practice as timeless or culturally universal. The songs analysed here are not simply examples of a global trend of English-mixing in popular music. They are documents of a specific moment in Indonesian cultural history, when the expansion of artistic freedom after decades of authoritarianism was expressed through the creative incorporation of English into popular song.

A significant limitation must be explicitly acknowledged in this context. Throughout the discussion, the language of intentionality has been applied to the structural and thematic choices identified in the corpus. These attributions are grounded in the systematic patterns of the textual analysis and in the convergence of those patterns with audience-perception data, but they cannot be confirmed without direct testimony from the lyric writers themselves. The authors made systematic attempts to obtain such testimony through multiple channels, including email correspondence, social media outreach, and telephone contact, directed at the lyric writers of all ten sampled songs. No responses were received from any of the contacted parties. This outcome, while precluding first-person verification of the interpretive claims advanced here, reflects a broader methodological challenge in popular music research in Indonesia. The interpretive claims in this discussion are therefore explicitly bounded as inferential rather than authorial. It remains possible that some of the structural regularities identified reflect genre conventions inherited from Western popular music formats, or that some English-language choices were shaped by producers or co-writers rather than the credited lyric writers alone. Future research would benefit from institutional collaboration with the Indonesian music industry to facilitate academic access to professional songwriters, enabling the interpretive findings of textual analysis to be

triangulated with first-person compositional accounts.

Unequal Conditions of Translingual Access

The predominantly positive audience reception documented in the survey should not obscure the structural inequality that also runs through the findings. The micro-level analysis established that English elements cluster in the chorus. This means that listeners whose English proficiency is limited encounter the language barrier precisely at the moment of maximum communicative intensity, a dynamic that is at once aesthetically alienating and ideologically significant. The survey data corroborate the scale of this potential problem: 41.8% of participants self-rated their English proficiency at Level 1 or 2 (Limited or Very Limited). While the survey did not directly measure comprehension difficulty, the self-proficiency data suggest that a substantial proportion of Indonesian popular music listeners may experience the translingual chorus as partially or wholly inaccessible to semantic understanding, even if its emotional register remains perceptible through melody, rhythm, and vocal performance (Eerola & Vuoskoski, 2012).

Dovchin et al. (2016) theorise this dynamic as ‘unequal translingual Englishes’. In the Indonesian context, access to English is stratified along educational, regional, and socioeconomic lines. The audience segments most likely to derive full semantic and affective benefit from translingual lyrics are also those with the highest levels of formal education and economic resources. The finding that one participant experienced the translingual lyrics as alienating (“I couldn’t understand and feel it; it just sounds weird”) is a data point rather than an anecdote. It gives voice to a form of listening experience that is likely more prevalent than the survey instrument was designed to capture. Pennycook’s (2019) call for translingual activism even as the songs themselves generally reproduce rather than contest the asymmetry between English and Indonesian in terms of cultural prestige.

HY’s deployment of ‘*jomblo*’ (single) alongside English holiday vocabulary offers a partial model for negotiating this inequality through local cultural embedding. By anchoring the English-language refrain to a distinctively Indonesian social concept, the lyric writer makes the translingual moment partially legible to listeners with limited English comprehension, since the local referent provides semantic grounding even when the English frame does not. This micro-level strategy of what might be called ‘culturally anchored translingualism’ points toward a productive area for future research: whether and how lyric writers consciously deploy local cultural markers to mediate the comprehension asymmetries that translingual practice otherwise risks creating. Kachru’s (1997)

argument that bilingual creativity should be recognised as a legitimate expression rather than as compensatory workarounds for linguistic limitations.

Three limitations are acknowledged: first, the purposive sample of ten songs limits generalisability. The structural and thematic patterns identified may reflect the conventions of the sampled artists or genres rather than a universal feature of Indonesian translingual lyric writing. Second, the audience survey (N = 67) is not nationally representative and was drawn from a single regional network. The perception data should be read as corroborating evidence that aligns with the textual findings, not as a standalone claim about Indonesian audience reception broadly. Third, as noted above, communicative intentions are inferred from textual patterns and audience data in the absence of direct songwriter input, despite documented outreach attempts; this remains the study's most fundamental epistemic limitation.

CONCLUSION

Macrostructural analysis in ten Indonesian-English popular songs identified love and romance as the dominant thematic domain across eight of the ten songs, evidenced by the high frequency of emotionally charged English and Indonesian lexical items in each lyric. Superstructural analysis established that nine of ten songs concentrate their translingual elements in the chorus or refrain. Micro-level coding confirmed the functional concentration of English in these high-salience positions. Triangulation of micro-level textual analysis, audience survey data, and socio-historical contextualisation identified three convergent communicative purposes: affective intensification and atmospheric alignment, cosmopolitan identity projection, and strategic orientation toward broader audiences. Audience data corroborate the textual findings: 76.1% of participants evaluated bilingual songs positively and attributed motivations, prioritising communicative and atmospheric craft over commercial ends.

These findings contribute to the literature on creative multilingualism (Canagarajah, 2013; Wei, 2018) by demonstrating that translingual practice in Indonesian popular music is structurally organised, communicatively purposive, and socio-historically conditioned by the post-Reformasi opening of cultural space after 1998. They extend van Dijk's (2014) SCA to the domain of popular song lyric analysis, a creative discourse genre that has not previously been examined through this framework. The findings pertain to the ten songs analysed and should not be generalised to Indonesian popular music as a whole. Future studies may benefit from a larger, more systematically sampled dataset of Indonesian popular songs to examine the structural

and thematic patterns of translingual lyric writing in Indonesia and with more focused participants. Also, seeking institutional partnerships with the Indonesian commercial music industry to facilitate structured access to professional lyric writers in future studies may provide a better perspective.

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