



Multilingualism as a Manifestation of the Desire of Split Subject in the Novel *Pintu* by Fira Basuki

Pujiharto Pujiharto^{1*} and Annisa Nur Harwiningtyas²

¹ Department of Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Cultural Sciences,
Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

² Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Yogyakarta State University, Depok,
Indonesia

pujiharto@ugm.ac.id

Abstract. This study will discuss the issue of multilingualism in Indonesian literature with a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective. This approach is very relevant to explain the relationship between multilingualism and the author's subjectivity. The author, as the subject, places multilingualism in Indonesian literary works as a manifestation of metaphor and metonymy in order to deceive the censorship in order to realize his desires. This study focuses on the novel *Pintu* by Fira Basuki. The data collected consisted of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that formally demonstrate multilingual language use. Analysis focused on the use of metaphor and metonymy as manifestations of desire to circumvent censorship. The results of the study show that through the novel *Pintu*, Fira Basuki elaborates on multilingualism through the use of Indonesian as the main language and includes Javanese, Tibetan, Sanskrit, and English in certain parts. The use of these languages marks Fira Basuki as a divided subject, which shows that Fira, like other Indonesian authors who write multilingual literature, is actually trying to find an objet petit a, which marks her as a subject lacking, in a search for endless fulfilment. The objet petit a is Indonesia, which in the song *Indonesia Raya* is referred to as being "there," where the author's subject stands as a guide, who is constantly in search.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Subject Split, Lack, Objet Petit A

1 Introduction

It has become a widely accepted view that the naming of Indonesian literature is closely linked to the use of Indonesian as its medium. Meanwhile, since its initial development in the 1920s, when it was still known as Malay [10], Indonesian has evolved as a language enriched with vocabulary from foreign and/or regional languages. Given this reality, the phenomenon of multilingualism in Indonesian, and thus also in Indonesian literature, is inevitable. If diction from foreign or regional languages is frequently used and deemed to have no equivalent, it will be absorbed with various adjustments and integrated into Indonesian. This similar process is how Indonesian fills in their own shortcomings.

© The Author(s) 2026

M. A. Norazlina et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference of Research on Language 2025 (IROLE 2025)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 1009,

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-563-8_37

Studies on multilingualism are generally conducted using linguistic perspectives such as sociolinguistics [9, 12] and neurolinguistics [5]. However, now studies on multilingualism have been widely connected with other fields, such as health [1, 4, 8], urban studies [11], and optical character recognition [12].

Researchers have also studied multilingualism with a psychoanalytic approach in literary works [2, 7]. Unlike the works above, this paper focuses on the split subject depicted in Indonesian novels.

One Indonesian author who is quite productive and powerful in elaborating on multilingualism to build her story world is Fira Basuki. Her name became known to the public with the publication of her novel trilogy: *Jendela-Jendela* (Windows), *Pintu* (Door), and *Atap* (Roof) in the early 2000s. Following these early novels, subsequent books were published: *Biru* (Blue), *Rojak*, *Brownies*, *Cinta dalam Sepotong Roti* (Love in a Piece of Bread), the short story collection *Alamak!*, the short story collection *Perempuan Hujan* (Rain Woman), *dwilogy of Astral Astria-Paris Pandora* (Paris Pandora), *Kapitan Pedang Panjang* (Long Sword Captain), series of *Miss B*, the children's series *Mandy & Mami*, the biographies of *Wimar Witoelar: "Hell, Yeah!"*, *140 Characters*, and *Fira and her late husband Hafez's memoir, Fira dan Hafez* (Fira and Hafez). This article discusses one of his novels, *Pintu* (Door). This novel was chosen because it strongly elaborates on the use of multilingualism.

Based on this background, the urgent question to ask is: what subconscious processes occur in the use of multilingualism in *Pintu*? What are Fira's desires as the subject of this multilingual process?

2 Theoretical Framework

To answer the research questions above, the relevant theory used is Lacanian psychoanalysis. This theory holds that the human unconscious has a structure similar to that of language. This structure, in the poststructuralist perspective, is the structure of language, which holds that language is an open system of signs and therefore its meaning is always unstable. This instability occurs because the meaning produced is always lacking. As a result, the subject of language experiences a continuous split [3].

The subject uses language to be able to complete what is lacking in him. In Lacan's perspective, what causes him to feel lacking is called *objet petit a*, namely the missing object that he always searches for to be able to fulfil his lack [6]. To reach the abstract *objet petit a*, the subject realizes his desire by trying to elaborate it in various ways. Because this effort always faces order, while order will always be an obstacle for the subject's desire in realizing his desire, the subject also deceives it by utilizing metaphor and metonymy devices [3]. The multilingual language used by the subject is actually a manifestation of metaphor and metonymy. In the eyes of the subject, multilingual language is a form of replacement and diversion of *objet petit a*. This is done by the subject because the diction that the Indonesian language he has is limited and cannot fulfil his desire to reach *objet petit a* to fulfil what is lacking in him.

3 Method

This research was conducted using a careful reading method. The research data consisted of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that demonstrated multilingual characteristics. The data was analysed using psychoanalysis, which sought to elaborate on the unconscious as a form of subjectivity manifested through multilingual language via the mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy.

4 Results and Discussion

Fira Basuki's novel *Pintu* tells the story of a character named Djati Suryo Wibowo Subagio. The opening scene depicts the young man, usually called Bowo, a descendant of Sunan Kalijaga, as he is about to marry a Minang girl named Aida. Throughout his journey leading up to their marriage, Bowo is depicted studying and working part-time in the United States, dating several women, interacting intensively with his extended family (grandmother, parents, younger sibling, and siblings), and interacting with the wider community. In these interactions, Bowo is constantly faced with significant challenges, but he manages to face them and overcome them with fortitude. In narrating the novel and depicting the interactions between the characters, Fira uses Indonesian as her primary language, interspersing regional languages (Javanese) and foreign languages (Sanskrit, Tibetan, or English). Fira's use of regional or foreign languages appears to be a means of fulfilling her own needs as a native speaker of Indonesian.

4.1 Multilingual data in the novel *Pintu*

The following presents quotations from regional and foreign languages used by Fira Basuki in writing the novel *Pintu*.

Table 1. Javanese Quotes

No	Page	Javanese Quotes	Indonesian Translation	English Translation
1.	1	“... Turuta atut aruntut, karongron saari ratri, yayah mimi lan mintuna, nadyan tekan ing don adi, away doh dunungira, awibawa ing swargadi...” (Serat Cemporet karya R. Ng. Ranggawarsita)	“...Semoga selalu dalam keadaan rukun, siang-malam selalu berdua bagaikan mimi dan mintuna, sampai pun kelak di alam abadi, jangan sampai jauh tempatmu dalam kehidupan sejahtera di sorga-galoka...”	“...May you always be in harmony, day and night always together like a lover and a lover, even in the eternal realm, do not let your place in a prosperous life in heaven be far away...”
2.	13	“Nak, ‘tak dongakne sesuk nek kowe gedhe bukumu sing akeh, dadine kowe ora	“Nak, Mama doakan kalau kamu sudah besar nanti kamu bisa punya buku yang banyak	“Son, I pray that when you grow up you will have lots of books so you won’t

3.	25	<p>usah ngemplang-ngemplang uwong koyo ngene.”</p> <p>“...tak uwusi gunem iki / niyatku mung aweh wikan / kebatinan akeh lire / lah gawat kaliwat-liwat / mula dipun prayitna / aja kleru pemilihmu / lamun Mardikebatinan...”</p> <p>(Lagu klasik Jawa)</p>	<p>jadi tidak usah menipu orang seperti ini.”</p> <p>Saya selesai berbicara / saya hanya berharap kamu bisa mengerti / begitu banyak pengetahuan kebatinan / yang sangat serius / jadi berhati-hatilah / jangan membuat kesalahan / jika kamu belajar ilmu kebatinan</p>	<p>have to cheat people like this.”</p> <p>I'm done talking / I just hope you can understand / so much spiritual knowledge / which is very serious / so be careful / don't make mistakes / if you study spiritual knowledge</p>
4.	142	<p>/... Yo pro kanca dolanan neng njaba / padang bulan, padange kaya rina / rembulan-ne, sing ngawe-awe / ngelekake aja pada turu sore... /</p>	<p>/... Ayo, teman-teman kita bermain di luar / bulan purnama, sinarnya sangatlah terang / bulan itu memanggil kita / mengingatkan agar tidak tidur cepat di sore hari /</p>	<p>/... Come on, our friends, let's play outside / the full moon, its light is so bright / the moon is calling us / reminding us not to sleep early in the afternoon /</p>

Table 2. Sanskrit Quote

No	Page	Sanskrit Quote	Indonesian Translation	English Translation
5.	9	“... sariram yad avapnoti yacapy utkratisvarah grhitvaitani samyati vayur gandhan ivasayat ...”	“Makhluk hidup di dunia material membawa berbagai paham hidupnya dari satu badan ke badan yang lain seperti udara membawa berbagai bau. Dengan demikian ia menerima jenis badan tertentu, lalu sekali lagi meninggalkan badan itu untuk menerima badan lain.”	"Living beings in the material world carry their various conceptions of life from one body to another, just as air carries various odors. Thus they assume a particular type of body and then abandon it again to assume another."

Table 3. Tibetan Quote

No	Page	Tibetan Quote	Indonesian Translation	English Translation
6.	36	“Mös gus yöd na, khyi so öd tung...”	Jika ada kepercayaan yang tinggi maka gigi anjing pun bisa memancarkan sinar	If there is high confidence, even a dog's teeth can emit light.

Table 4. English Quotes

No	Page	English Quotes
7.	65	<p>“...If you indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life. For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one...”</p> <p>Kahlil Gibran</p>
8.	121	<p>We have lost even this twilight./ No one saw us thing evening hand in hand while the blue night dripped on the world. / / I remember you with my soul clenched. / In that sadness of mine that you know. // Where were you then? / Who else was there? / Saying what? / Why will the whole of love come on me suddenly / When I am sad and feel you are far away?... / //</p> <p>Clenched Soul by Pablo Neruda (1904–1973)</p>
9.	131	<p>Chicago, 25 Desember 1996.</p> <p>Sebuah headline di Chicago Herald: “Paris Perished by Husband”</p> <p>A young, beautiful girl born Paris Marie Custoe, killed last night by her estranged husband, Adam Anderson. “After fighting over the Christmas dinner, husband became angry and stabbed her eight times in the stomach with a kitchen knife,” si-adea neighbor...</p> <p>Speculations over a secret affair that Paris had never told Adam have arisen. “She was a happy person when her husband was not around,” said another neighbor... “This is not the way to celebrate Christmas,” said her aunt crying. “Where was the miracle?”</p>
10.	131–132	<p>/... On nights like this, I held her in my arms. / I kissed her so many times under the infinite sky // ...What does it matter that my love couldn't keep her. / The night is full of stars and she is not with me./ That's all. Far away, someone sings. Far away. / My soul is lost without her. // As if to bring her near, my eyes search for her. / My heart searches for her and she is not with me. // The same night that whitens the same tree //</p> <p>Saddest Poem, by Pablo Neruda</p>
11.	149	<p>Love is anterior to life, / Posterior to death, / Initial of creation, and / The exponent of breath.</p>

4.2 Fira Basuki as a Split Subject

By using various languages besides Indonesian, namely Javanese (quotes 1, 2, 3, 4), Sanskrit (quote 5), and Tibetan (quote 6), it appears that for Fira, Indonesian is inadequate for realizing her desires. This means that these three languages are used to fill the gap in the Indonesian language subject. However, the accompanying translations indicate that to fill the gap, simply presenting quotes from these three languages, which are merely a series of sounds (signifiers) whose meanings are poorly understood, is not enough. Translating the Javanese quotes into Indonesian is crucial because the novel "Pintu" is intended for Indonesian readers, not just Javanese. Translating the Tibetan and Sanskrit quotes into Indonesian is necessary because these two languages are considered foreign and unfamiliar, and even if readers consult a dictionary, they will still have difficulty understanding them unless they have studied both languages. By understanding their meaning, efforts to fill the gap in the Indonesian language subject can be effectively implemented.

In contrast to the writing of the three previous language quotations, the English quotations in points 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 are not followed by the writing of their translations. This was done by Fira because, on the one hand, Fira herself as the author, and also the main character, Bowo, are young people who studied in the United States, a country where the people use English as their main language so that English for them is the language used in everyday life; on the other hand, readers of the novel *Pintu* are considered to be able to understand English quotations, an international language that has reached various worlds/cultures.

In addition to the long quotations above, efforts to fulfill the shortcomings in the Indonesian language subject are also made by citing words or phrases in Javanese, for example, *matur sembah nuwun* (thank you) (p. 1), *terlegi* (sweetest), *ngelantur* (wandering) (p. 5), *ana bocah kok kelap-kelap kaya langit* (there is a child who twinkles like a star), *banyu gege* (water that has been dried in the sun for 1 hour), *weton* (time of birth) (p. 10), *jumbuhing kawula Gusti* (the union of man with God) (p. 25), *cipta, rasa, karya, ... mamayu hayuning bawono, ati suci* (creation, feeling, work, ... beautifying the world, a pure heart) (p. 26), and others; in English, for example, *Man* (p. 2), the X-factor (p. 3), *jaundice* (p. 9), *Guess what?* (p. 13), and others.

Table 5. Short Javanese Quotes

No.	Page	Quote	Indonesian Translation	English Translation
12.	1	<i>matur sembah nuwun</i>	terima kasih	thank you
13.	5	<i>terlegi, ngelantur</i>	paling manis; berbicara menyimpang dari topik	sweetest; wandering
14	10	<i>ana bocah kok kelap-kelap kaya langit; banyu gege; weton</i>	Ada anak bercahaya terang seperti langit;	there is a child who twinkles like a star;

			air yang telah dijemur selama 1 jam; hari kelahiran	water that has been dried in the sun for 1 hour; time of birth
15	25	jumbuhing kawula Gusti	menyatunya manusia dan Tuhan	the union of man with God
16	26	cipta, rasa, karya, ... mami hayuning bawono, ati suci	mencipta, merasa, berkarya ... mempercantik dunia, hati suci	creation, feeling, work, ... beautifying the world, a pure heart

Table 5. Short English Quotes

17.	2	Man
18.	3	the X-factor
19.	9	jaundice
20.	13	Guess what?

4.3 Fira Basuki's Desire: Indonesia as *Object Petit a*

Fira, as a subject of Indonesian, engages in multilingual practice because she is a subject lacking. She attempts to fulfil her lack by using languages other than Indonesian. Judging from its meaning, the Javanese quotation (number 1) is used as advice for Bowo and Aida, who are getting married, to ensure their marriage lasts. The advice is transferred (metonymized) to Javanese proverbs in Javanese because codified Indonesian diction cannot maintain the subtlety of its meaning. In this way, Fira, as a subject of Indonesian, can fulfil her lack.

The meaning of the second Javanese quote is used as his mother's advice to Bowo not to steal books. This advice is very fitting to be expressed in Javanese because her statement contains a nuance of deep meaning that cannot be replaced by Indonesian. In this statement of advice, not only does the mother show anger because her son stole, but because what was stolen was a book, a useful item because it increases knowledge, there is also a sense of pride in it, so that the statement is transformed into a prayer that in the future, Bowo will have many books.

The third Javanese quote, from a classic Javanese song, contains profound advice relevant to Bowo, the main character in this novel. As a descendant of Sunan Kalijaga, one of the Wali Sanga, Bowo is believed to possess spiritual knowledge, like his grandfather, who was renowned for his powerful and profound spiritual knowledge. Such a person must be cautious. This is evident in the later stages of his life, which are always marked by supernatural experiences. The sacred meaning contained in this advice, written in Javanese, becomes profane when translated into Indonesian.

The use of Javanese in excerpt 4, a Javanese song, is intended to reinforce the Javanese atmosphere of Bowo's childhood. The singing of the song evokes the Javanese atmosphere of the village, contributing to the novel's development, thus powerfully influencing readers to imagine a Javanese setting. For Fira, the use of Javanese also fills in the gaps in Indonesian.

The use of Sanskrit in quote 5, taken from the Bhagavad Gita, which implicitly explains how reincarnation occurs, is intended to support the Javanese perception of the still strong influence of heredity (*bibit*). Bowo, who is said to be a descendant of Sunan Kalijaga, is seen as a powerful figure like his grandfather. This perception is reinforced by an incident he experienced when he was born; his body was yellow, and for a month, a light emanated from his body until the yellow skin disappeared. This incident seems to provide evidence that Bowo's yellow body is actually the reincarnation of his ancestor, Sunan Kalijaga. The use of Sanskrit quoted from the Bhagavad Gita gives it a strong sense of sacredness, which also helps fill the gap in the Indonesian language.

The use of Tibetan in excerpt 6 is intended to convey the magical atmosphere of Tibet, as compared to the sacred atmosphere of Java. In Tibet, "people with special talents used to assist officials in reading the auras of guests" (p. 36).

The use of English in excerpt 7, a poem by Kahlil Gibran, is intended to provide spiritual strength for the lingering spirit of Anna, who committed suicide. The use of English in excerpt 8, an obituary about Paris, who was murdered by her husband, is intended to provide a realistic depiction of the American setting of the story. The English-language news report adds a sense of realism to the location of the murder.

The use of English in excerpt 9, a poem by Pablo Neruda, is intended to depict the affair between Paris, a woman frustrated by her unhappy marriage to her husband, and Bowo. The use of English in excerpt 10, a poem by Pablo Neruda, creates a sense of déjà vu for Bowo after Paris is murdered by her husband. The use of English in excerpt 11 is a congratulatory message addressed to Bowo, who is about to get married.

The above explanation demonstrates that Fira Basuki, as a subject of Indonesian, has sought an object *petit a* and found a regional or foreign language suitable for her needs, one that cannot be replaced by codified Indonesian as a complement. When viewed broadly within the context of the nation, the object *petit a* sought through the dynamics of multilingualism, with Indonesian as the primary language, depicted in the novel *Pintu*, is Indonesia itself, which in the song "Indonesia Raya" is referred to as existing "there," where the author's subject "stands as a guide," and is constantly searching.

4.4 From Multilingualism to Language Absorption

Theoretically, it is very possible that the words above, whose writings retain their original forms, will one day be absorbed into Indonesian. If this absorption occurs, it will certainly enrich the Indonesian language and further establish it as an international language. These loan words, because they have become accepted, are used without much consideration, unlike words that retain their original forms in regional or foreign languages. These loan words, like those that have been accepted as Indonesian, have also complemented the language's shortcomings. Their continued use as a literary language will undoubtedly add to the growing list of metaphorical and metonymic words, enriching the language with new meanings, even though they themselves will always be diction with a split meaning. For example, loan words with a split meaning are seen in the word "June." The word that became the basis for the character's self-name, June Larasati Subagio, was envied by Bowo because when compared to his full name, namely Djati Suryo Wibowo Subagio, which all comes from Javanese, the name June (p. 14), which comes from English, sounds more stylish. Likewise, with other diction, if the absorbed diction is analyzed one by one.

5 Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, it can be seen that Fira Basuki, as the subject of Indonesian, engages in multilingual practices in her novel *Pintu* to fulfil her own needs. Regional and foreign languages are retained in her writing to achieve the object *petit a*,

the object of desire hidden behind their meanings. However, if used frequently in Indonesian, the diction in these regional and foreign languages will be absorbed and become part of the Indonesian language. Within the national context, all of this is truly a quest for Indonesia.

Disclosure of Interests. The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

References

1. Abdulla, M.M., & Ali, A.M.M. Intercultural sensitivity, challenges, and perceived value in multicultural group work among third-year medical students at Alexandria university, Egypt (2023–2024), *BMC Medical Education*, , **25**(1), 1038 (2025)
2. Antinucci, P. Poetics in the shadow of the other's language: The melancholic discourse of the trilingual poet Amelia Rosselli, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, **97**(5), pp. 1321–1342 (2016)
3. Faruk. Pascastukturalisme teori, implikasi, metodologi, dan contoh aplikasi, Jakarta: Pusat Bahasa, Depdiknas (2008)
4. Hurley O'Dwyer, R., Stout, R.C., Koum Besson, É.S., Bustinduy, A.L., Connolly, M.A. Towards multilingualism in global health, *Globalization and Health*, **21**(1), 16 (2025)
5. Kousaie, S., Klein, D. Advances in our understanding of bilingual brain organization: A look back and a view forward, *Journal of Neurolinguistics*, **76**, 101289 (2025)
6. Lacan, J. *Ecrits*, London & New York: Routledge. (1977)
7. Lauret, M. Wanderwords: Language Migration in American Literature, in *Wanderwords Language Migration in American Literature*, pp. 1–334 (2014)
8. Lei, H., Jiang, Z. Linguistic insights into dementia from 1994 to 2023: A structural topic modeling-assisted bibliometric analysis, *Language and Health*, **3**(2), 100064 (2025)
9. Martínez, G. Mayor-Rocher, M., Huertas, C.P., Grandury, M., Reviriego, P. Spanish is not just one: A dataset of Spanish dialect recognition for LLMs, *Data in Brief*, **63**, 112088 (2025)
10. Teeuw, A. *Sastra Baru Indonesia Jilid I*, Ende, Flores: Nusa Indah (1980)
11. Weckmüller, D., Dunkel, A., Burghardt, D. Embedding-Based Multilingual Semantic Search for Geo-Textual Data in Urban Studies, *Journal of Geovisualization and Spatial Analysis*, **9**(2), 31 (2025)
12. Yang, Z., Wang, P. Current status and research trend of English language assessment: a bibliometric analysis, *Language Testing in Asia*, , **15**(1), 11 (2025)
13. Yang, Y., Eli, E., Aysa, A., Ubul, K. Script identification in multilingual environment: a survey in recent years, *Artificial Intelligence Review*, **58**(10), 294 (2025)

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

