

Language as liberation: A relevance-theoretic analysis of bilingualism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's diasporic fiction



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ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 30 September 2025

Revised: 3 December 2025

Accepted: 12 February 2026

Published: 4 March 2026

Keywords

Bilingualism

Cognitive

Discourse

Linguistic

Pragmatic

Relevance theory.

The present study explores the role of language as a tool for liberation in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's diasporic fictions, *Sister of My Heart* and *Queen of Dreams*. While analysing literary language within a text is central to stylistic studies, examining the use of bilingualism offers deeper insight into cultural intimacy, identity and also challenges monolingualism in literary discourse. This research investigates bilingualism through the framework of Relevance Theory, as proposed by Sperber and Wilson, which claims that communication is the process of inferring meaning driven by the aim of achieving optimal relevance. By applying this theory to bilingualism, it becomes clear that writing is a creative act, enabling authors to incorporate their mother tongue or first language into English discourse, thereby blending linguistic systems, infusing cultural nuance, and creating "mutual cognitive environment" that connects readers across borders. Additionally, writers transcend monolingual constraints and use language as a means of liberation. However, this research analyses the concept through three elements of bilingualism, i.e., pragma markers, code-switching, and plural markers, demonstrating how language facilitates liberation for writers. Hence, adding a new perspective enriches literary bilingualism, deepens narrative depth, preserves cultural memory, and enhances understanding of language as an aesthetic device in literature.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by analyzing Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's bilingual strategy as a form of liberation for authors. Furthermore, by applying Relevance Theory to Divakaruni's diasporic fiction, the primary contribution of this paper is to offer a new perspective on how bilingualism creates a cognitive environment in readers' minds across borders.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language for diasporic authors is not only a means of communication but also a tool for liberation. It reflects the characters' struggles, memories, and quest for freedom. Writers navigating multiple cultural worlds often incorporate bilingual and multilingual elements into their work. According to Bandia (2007), integrating bilingualism into writing allows authors to reclaim their cultural identity (p. 147). Furthermore, they challenge monolingual conventions and reshape the literary language into what Anzaldúa (2004) describes as a "border tongue" (p. 55). This article aims to examine the language use, specifically bilingualism, that liberates the literary voice of diasporic writers like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, who is renowned for her storytelling technique and for constructing identity through her characters in contemporary literature.

According to research on word order (syntax) in English, English is an SVO language, whereas Indian languages are SOV. The word order rule is more strictly enforced in writing than in speech. The adoption of such an approach (word order) can be considered a method that alters the boundaries between spoken and written discourse (Suzuki, 2009). The present study uses relevance theory as an analytical tool to explain the use of untranslated words or bilingual insertions, which are more commonly employed in spoken forms, fostering cognitive resonance to understand the two diasporic texts, *Sister of My Heart* and *Queen of Dreams*.

According to Bloomfield, "Bilingualism was studied early as two linguistic codes coexisting in one individual" (Murray, 1991). This was later interpreted to mean that it is not different from bidialectalism, arguing that as a cognitive and social organizational system, it presents no greater challenges for individuals than monolingualism (Gumperz, 1982). Although both bilinguals and monolinguals form numerous "semiotic identities" through face-to-face interaction (e.g., gender identities, social identities, and transitional identities), the bilingual's bicultural identity is seen as problematic and chaotic, as this identity is said to be in a state of structural crisis. Moreover, it is only the bilingualism of the elites, characterized by its instrumental or "high culture" role, that is regarded as an asset for the learned (Paulston, 1980). However, literature can offer individuals the opportunity to examine the entirety of their cultural history, which is essential for individuals to establish or generate a new unified identity (Wyatt-Brown, 1995).

In Indian literature, bilingualism is more than just a linguistic tool; it acts as a pathway for cultural exchange and social mobility. The relationship between English and approximately 1,500 indigenous languages in India (Census India, 2010-2011) has led to literary multilingualism in speech and discourse. Education plays a crucial role in promoting bilingualism, with many schools offering instruction in regional languages alongside Hindi and English in India (Mohanty, 2018). According to Rushdie (1992), India has moved beyond the debate over utilizing the ex-colonizer's language. Moreover, postcolonial English has been redefined by Indians, resulting in children of independent India using it as their own language for their own purposes (p. 64). Consequently, the distinct development of regional varieties of English in contemporary usage has given rise to terms like Hinglish, Banglish, and Tenglish (Dutta & Rajeswari, 2015). Numerous studies by sociolinguists indicate that Indians in a multilingual context often switch between languages (Bhat, 2010).

However, in this multilingual environment, Divakaruni's fiction is characterized by a rich tapestry of language. Additionally, she is well-versed in storytelling techniques. Her narrative style is unique, lyrical, and deeply rooted in the nexus of culture, gender, and identity. Bilingualism acts as a linguistic strategy in her works, with culturally embedded expressions that transform language into a tool of liberation. Much of the existing research has primarily focused on themes of displacement, identity, and feminism, with limited attention to the cognitive and pragmatic dimensions of her bilingual narrative style. Hence, the present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- a) To apply Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) in Divakaruni's diasporic fiction and explore the narrative strategies that create a mutual cognitive environment among readers across borders.
- b) To analyze the use of bilingual expressions in fiction, with an emphasis on three elements: pragmatic markers, code switching, and plural markers.
- c) To assert the role of language as a linguistic strategy for liberation in diasporic fiction, with a focus on the cultural significance of linguistic hybridity.

2. BILINGUALISM IN DIASPORIC WRITING

Bilingualism in diasporic writing often manifests through code-switching, where the interaction of two or more languages intentionally shapes meaning and identity within a text. This switching typically occurs not only at the sentence or passage level (code-switching) but also at the phrase or word level (code-mixing). Auer (1999) distinguishes between local and global meanings, describing code-switching as "locally meaningful" and code-mixing as "meaningful... in a more global sense" (p. 310). Gumperz (1982) proposes a typology of code-switching functions, suggesting that such switching in speech is highly intentional rather than random. Instead, it serves specific

communicative purposes. Gumperz developed this initial typology based on his studies of code-switching across three different language contexts, identifying functions such as “quotations, addressee specification, interjections, reiteration, message qualification, personalization versus objectivization” (p. 75).

Furthermore, Gumperz also focuses on the reasons why authors code-switch and states that “linguistic needs for lexical gaps, quoting, specifying addresses, emphasizing arguments, expressing solidarity, or emotional involvement” (p. 152). On the other hand, Auer (1995) highlights the term “conversational loci,” where code-switching frequently occurs, such as reported speech, parenthetical comments, puns, language play, and comment structure (p. 120). As a result, code-switching is regarded as a fluid, dynamic, and creative process that functions as a deliberate resource for generating meaning, identity, and social positioning in a multilingual context (Chakravarty, 2018).

Examining the portrayal of spoken speech in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s novels reveals extensive use of bilingualism at various levels, including orthography, code-switching, and code-mixing. She often uses the Bengali language, which is her mother tongue, to express cultural intimacy, maintain ethnic identity, and represent diasporic voices within English narratives. This study explores the functions of literary bilingualism in *Sister of My Heart* and *Queen of Dreams*, aiming to determine how Divakaruni strategically employs bilingual elements such as pragma markers, code-switching, and plural markers to create a “mutual cognitive environment” between text and readers (Chakravarty, 2018).

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, one of the most recognized voices in contemporary Indian diasporic literature, plays a vital role in discussions of language, identity, and cultural negotiation. Her fiction often explores the complexities of migration, displacement, and belonging, with a particular focus on women’s experiences as they navigate between tradition and modernity. According to Zupančič (2013), in her article *Ethics of Wisdom and Compassion in the Novels by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni*, Divakaruni’s novels offer fresh insights into contemporary women’s literature in the United States by blending her Bengali heritage with history, myth, and magic. She emphasizes that her works highlight ethics grounded in respect for diversity, weaving wisdom and compassion as central themes. Through her storytelling, Divakaruni underscores moral virtues that can bridge cultural divides and inspire ethical human interactions. Ultimately, her narratives serve as a call for universal compassion and wisdom as foundations for harmonious relationships. Jones (2010), in her book chapter *Understanding Literature: A Reader’s Guide*, analyzed the language used in Divakaruni’s stories to understand Sudha’s internal conflict and cultural contradictions.

Anushruti (2025) interprets the text *Sister of My Heart* as a center for the ongoing negotiation of diasporic identity, describing it as “a poignant narrative of transformation, resistance, and resilience” (730), grounded in the dynamics of nostalgia, alienation, and empowerment. Furthermore, Kathoon and Meeran (2023) describe Divakaruni’s diasporic consciousness as a complex matrix of loneliness, rootlessness, and cultural questioning, indicating that diaspora represents not only dispersal but also “a matrix of consciousness” (p. 440). Fatima and Mohammad (2023) analyzed her short stories and acknowledged that Divakaruni’s migrant women deal with exile, alienation, and displacement. In the end, they create new hybrid identities that question entrenched ideas of belonging. In addition to themes of identity, Divakaruni’s narrative style also attracts academic interest.

In her article *Deciphering Sisterhood: A Semiotic Exploration of Shared Symbols in Indian Narratives*, Sati and Gaurav (2024) emphasize the transformative potential of female solidarity, asserting that Divakaruni depicts sisterhood not merely as a personal haven but also as a socio-cultural tool of empowerment that challenges patriarchal limitations and redefines identity within both diasporic and traditional contexts. Divakaruni is also renowned for her utilization of mythologies in feminist writing. In her article *“A Feminist Revisionist Study of Divakaruni’s Sita”*, Mondal, Sivapurapu, Raj, and Raju (2024) reclaim Sita’s silenced voice through a feminist interpretation of the Ramayana in *The Forest of Enchantments*. The study demonstrates how Divakaruni grants Sita narrative agency and autonomy to write about love, responsibility, exile, and resistance in the first person. Mondal argues that this revisionist approach not only challenges male-centric mythological discourse but also emphasizes the role of female subjectivity in reimagining cultural memory (p. 699).

Bakayaraj and Pal (2022) argue that the novel *Oleander Girl* challenges fixed identity markers, such as national, racial, and religious ties, suggesting that diasporic selves are better understood through pluralism. They also state that Divakaruni's novel explores identity formation and identity crises in cross-cultural settings. Another study, Chu (2024), demonstrates how Taiwanese society has utilized the Wu Feng legend to establish mainstream identity and marginalize indigenous voices. By portraying indigenous peoples as subjects in need of 'civilizing,' the narrative promotes colonial stereotypes and highlights the significance of storytelling in cultural identity development.

Although existing scholarship has extensively examined themes of female solidarity, diasporic identity, and feminism in Divakaruni's selected works, the relevance-theoretic analysis of her bilingual diasporic fiction remains significantly underexplored. While Chakravarty (2018) offers a useful framework for understanding literary multilingualism more broadly, there is still limited research on Divakaruni's strategic use of bilingual elements such as pragmatic markers, code switching, and plural markers. These elements are not merely employed for linguistic decoration but also challenge monolingual norms, further serving as a liberatory medium for an Indian author writing in English. Therefore, the present study explores the limited attention given to the cognitive and pragmatic dimensions of her bilingual narrative style and the readers' interpretative process within the "mutual cognitive environment".

3. THEORETICAL APPROACH TO LITERARY LANGUAGE

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novels attract a diverse readership worldwide, posing compelling challenges for literary criticism, as any theoretical approach to her work must recognize both their aesthetic and thematic richness, as well as their broad accessibility. This study employs the Relevance Theory of Sperber and Wilson (1986) to examine the use of literary bilingualism that reinforces the enduring influence of cultural richness on readers. According to Relevance Theory, communication is an asymmetrical process where the discourse initiator, in this case, the author, bears the complete responsibility for constructing the text and literary language to guide the readers' interpretative process within the "mutual cognitive environment." Through the use of bilingual markers such as pragmatic markers, code-switching, and plural markers, Divakaruni creates a shared cognitive environment among readers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Sperber and Wilson define the term "cognitive environment" as.

A fact [assumption] is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true. An individual's total cognitive environment is a function of his physical environment and his cognitive abilities. It consists of memorized information, which is a component of cognitive abilities (Sperber & Wilson, 1986).

Thus, the framework enhances research by linking bilingual expressions' linguistic tactics to the reader-response aspect of literary interpretation. Divakaruni's narrative technique is characterized by her consistent use of bilingual expressions in English, combined with Bengali and Hindi lexicon, family markers, ritual phrases, and oral storytelling methods. Consequently, the study demonstrates Divakaruni's harmonious balance between global appeal and cultural rootedness through the incorporation of Bengali language in her two English novels, *Sister of My Heart* and *Queen of Dreams*.

The English language was initially introduced in Indian schools as a tool of colonial dominance, as Macaulay (1835) argued that we must, at present, do our best to form a class who may serve as interpreters between us and the millions we govern. A class of persons Indian in blood and color but English in taste, opinions, morals, and intellect (p. 34). Therefore, the English language became both an act of subversion and empowerment. Conversely, in a multilingual society like India, the adoption of English facilitated the coordination of the Indian liberation struggle across the entire subcontinent (Rushdie, 1992).

In this context, English served less as a means of forming identity and more as a tool for facilitating expression within a shared linguistic framework. This concept aligns with Chomsky (2014)'s theory of Universal Grammar (UG)

and Taylor's view of Human Linguistic Capacity (HLC). The HLC posits that universal linguistic principles are innate and generate, constrain, and determine the range of our linguistic capacities (Chomsky, 2014). According to Taylor (2016), language can be understood as an instrument used to encode information that is detached from reality (p. 4). Relevance Theory, developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986), will be utilized to explain the role of bilingualism in the English language used by Divakaruni. The aim is to understand the cognitive environment that enables us to see how language acts as a means of liberation not only for characters but also for authors to express layered identities and resonate with readers.

Some theorists also emphasize the importance of promoting and reviving indigenous languages as part of national identity. In *Sister of My Heart* and *Queen of Dreams*, Divakaruni employs a patterned linguistic approach to convey relevance that readers can easily understand. This includes pragma-markers (such as kinship vocatives, interjections, and ritual lexicon) that indicate closeness and cultural stance, code-switching (the blending of two different languages) that helps diverse audiences understand, and plural markers (like pluralized cultural nouns and common Indianisms) that make bilingual habitus feel natural in English narration. These cues maintain cultural identity while explaining the novels' broad appeal among both diasporic and non-diasporic readers (Sperber & Wilson, 1986).

Gumperz (1982) demonstrates that code-switching fulfills systematic functions such as citation, addressee designation, interjection, reiteration, message qualification, and personalization rather than occurring randomly. Grosjean (1989) expands this to include motivations such as fulfilling lexical needs, signaling solidarity, strengthening arguments, or controlling position, while Auer (1995) identifies switching in frequent conversational contexts (reported speech, subject shifts, side comments, and language play). He claims that "it is a futile endeavor to give a closed classificational scheme for code-switching, as an indeterminate number of interpretations can be arrived at" (p. 284).

Auer (1995) also argues that "participants don't just choose one type from some fixed set of alternatives"; rather, the switching is "closely tied to the specific, never-identical circumstances in which alternation occurs" (p. 3). This study does not aim to present a permanent, stable, or static conception of literary multilingualism. Conversely, code-switching is viewed as a creative, dynamic, and fluid activity. We found it helpful to expand on this list to describe some functions of literary bilingualism, thereby establishing a shared cognitive framework for analyzing the novels, although it will never be feasible to compile a comprehensive list of all code-switching functions.

Cortés-Conde and Boxer (2002) illustrate how bilingual wordplay influences relational identities, reflecting the fluid self-positioning characteristic of diasporic characters. They examine how bilingual wordplay in *Woman Hollering Creek* creates a relational identity, symbolizing hybridity and community. This body of literature has primarily focused on Latin American or Hispanic fiction, with less emphasis on Indian diasporic themes. Therefore, Relevance Theory offers valuable insights into literary bilingualism and how Divakaruni, through her texts, conveys the author's message to the reader.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This section employs relevance-theoretic analysis, developed by Sperber and Wilson, to demonstrate how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni utilises language and common representations in her novels to construct and vividly depict characters and their lives.

This analysis does not aim to demonstrate the intricate relationship between cognition and its manifestations in readers and writers. Instead, it provides a schematic overview of potential information sources during the communication process through the use of bilingualism. Additionally, it seeks to identify the chronological order of internal discourse information and its significance within the broader context of a literary text by analysing the shared cognitive environment established by Divakaruni within the framework proposed by Chakravarty (2018) of three categories: Pragma-Markers, Code-switching, and Plural Markers.

4.1. Pragma Markers

The use of non-standard word order in speech or to imitate a speech pattern, as well as the development of a sardonic, satirical, or ironic tone alongside an authentic tone, is apparent. According to researchers, colloquial Bengali and Hindi do not always follow the standard word order, or SOV. It has been observed that subjects, objects, and other constituents may appear before the subject and after the predicate in sentences found in the studied literary texts. The study identifies two categories of sentence parts that occur either before or after a predicate. There is a prosodic division between the subject and the pre-subject element in the first type, which is believed to be influenced by factors such as thinking and speaking time. Below are a few examples from the texts. For instance, fillers are often used to represent dialogue forms, such as *Ah* and *hai* in the examples below. However, according to the literature on Hindi or Bengali word order, sentence-final phrases like tag-like expressions and final particles are considered part of the predicate. Using non-canonical structures, or syntactic arrangements that reorder the conventional sequence of elements (in English, Subject-Verb-Object), is one method to ensure that this information flow is maintained.

In *Sister of My Heart*, Divakaruni uses fillers as identity anchors, emphasizing the protagonists' connection to their Indian background despite the novel's international audience. The reluctance to translate these expressions creates a shared cognitive environment (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), in which readers become familiar with Indian speech patterns and experience immediate identification, while new readers infer meaning from context. Thus, it increases inclusion without cultural dilution. This method exemplifies what Anzaldúa (2004) describes as a "border tongue," in which language functions as a center of cultural negotiation and resistance.

Divakaruni transforms the filler into a refined act of linguistic liberation, reclaiming native territory within an English-centric narrative. Here, exclamatory markers like '*ah*' and '*hai*' are regarded as pragma-markers. The expression *ah* requires minimal articulation processing while delivering a significant cognitive effect. It conveys irony, establishes a judgment, and prepares the reader to interpret the rest of the sentence as evaluative rather than neutral. Consequently, the marker achieves notable pragmatic efficiency. *Ah* has been used with various expressions depending on the context in the following dialogues.

"Ah, finally, one of the Chatterjee girls gets what she deserves." (Divakaruni, 1999).

In the above example from *Sister of My Heart*, Divakaruni uses the filler 'Ah' as a pragma marker to indicate the judgment that Basudha receives from Sister Baptista, who uses the expression to point out one of the Chatterjee sisters in her sternest tone in front of the entire class. In other words, the pragma marker used in the line demonstrates how Basudha faced humiliation and social judgment, particularly for being one of the Chatterjee daughters. The meaning of 'Ah' as an expression changes in the next example.

"Ah, how much older than Anju my promise makes me feel" (Divakaruni, 1999).

Ah," he said in a little sigh. And before I could stop him, he bent to kiss my hands (Divakaruni, 1999).

Unlike the expression of judgment used above, here the same expression *Ah* conveys the emotion of a sigh. From the example above, readers can experience the burden Sudha carries in her heart, knowing her father was the reason for Anju's father's death. The statement encapsulates the guilt she feels for being the daughter of a mysterious outsider whose entry into the Chatterjee family has altered their destiny.

Divakaruni reveals how particles in a language can be used as a vehicle for expressing the weight of unspoken grief and inherited responsibility.

"Wait, I didn't know it was your graduation. What can I give you? Ah," he says. He twists his finger and pulls off a ring. It flickers in his palm like an eye of fire (Divakaruni, 1999).

"Ah, a story," nods Pishi (Divakaruni, 1999).

In the words of Ashok and Pishi, the pragma markers in both examples here express a sense of discovery. In the first dialogue, *ah* is used at the end as a complete answer to the self-asked question by Ashok. It reveals a moment of cognitive shift, in which Ashok finds a solution to the dilemma of what gift to offer Sudha on her graduation day.

Conversely, in the second dialogue, *ah* expresses self-discovery as Pishi tells a story, affirming that the act of storytelling is meaningful.

Ah, as a marker occurs frequently, appearing sixteen times in the text, whereas the other example of a pragma marker, *hai*, is used only once in *Sister of My Heart*. It functions as an interjection that conveys dramatic emotional intensity.

“Hai bhagaban!” my mother said, turning her appealing eyes toward heaven. “Now she demands to be treated like a son.” (Divakaruni, 1999).

The marker *hai* used by Nalini does not function as a lexical item with propositional meaning. Rather, it serves a pragmatic role in conveying the mother’s emotional state. The Bengali word *Bhagaban* (God) is an expression of shock at Anju’s argument of not treating them like sons. *Bhagaban*, with the particle *hai*, along with the gesture of turning her head towards heaven, signifies an emotional appeal dramatizing distress.

“Bas, bas, Nalini,” says Pishi. The poor girl’s about to faint, she’s that tired, can’t you see? (Divakaruni, 1999).

Another example of a pragmatic particle is *bas*, used by Aunt Pishi, which serves as a clear example of bilingualism, reflecting speech patterns rooted in Indian languages, particularly Hindi and Bengali. Here, in the dialogue where Pishi interrupts Nalini to stop, *bas* functions as a discourse particle meaning “enough” in the sentence (used twice in the same expression). It regulates the flow of conversation by halting Nalini’s escalating criticism and redirecting attention to Sudha’s exhaustion.

The other examples below show the onomatopoeic exclamatory particle from *Sister of My Heart*.

Oof! Says Ashok. “Not again! I’m beginning to think she doesn’t want me anywhere near you.” (Divakaruni, 1999).

Ogo, she cries, raising her eyes heavenward to address my dead uncle, “Where have you gone?” (Divakaruni, 1999).

Onomatopoeic expressions also function as pragmatic markers with minimal processing effort; they provide high cognitive payoff by representing the tone and mood of the character. *Oof*, with an exclamation mark, as used by Ashok in the above example, portrays a feeling of frustration and discomfort. He does not describe the feeling when he touched Dayita inside her mother’s womb; instead, he uses an onomatopoeic sound that resembles breath being forced out. Conversely, the Bengali expression *Ogo* in the second example is used by Nalini to lament her deceased husband. Her dramatized emotional vulnerability positions her as a suffering widow.

Another example of the Pragma markers is the transliteration from Hindi and, mostly, from Bengali. Divakaruni has used terms like *Mother Kali*, *Sindoor*, *Durga Puja*, *Kirtan*, *Bhagwan*, *Pati Param Guru*, *Shubho Drishti* in *Sister of My Heart*, which represent the characters’ religious backgrounds. Therefore, it helps to establish a “mutual cognitive environment” (Sperber & Wilson, 1986) for the readers. These particles assist diasporic readers in understanding the cultural intimacy of the Indian language in Divakaruni’s work, whereas non-diasporic readers derive the meaning from context. Hence, this reflects the bilingual quality of her novel and also maintains the oral authenticity of Indian languages.

4.2. Code-Switching

The practice of switching between two or more languages, dialects, or speech patterns during a single conversation is known as code-switching. People use this technique for various reasons. In diasporic literature, code-switching helps connect with specific social groups and express different aspects of their identities while living abroad. Trousdale (2010), in his *Introduction to English Sociolinguistics* (2010), describes code-switching as a linguistic situation where a speaker switches between two variants (codes) while conversing with another individual who shares the same syntactic vocabulary. Additionally, it can be interpreted as an act of “resistance to the domination of state-authorized languages” (Bandia, 2007).

Diasporic writers frequently employ code-switching terms and expressions as part of bilingualism to reflect their characters’ acceptance of diverse cultures and languages in a foreign land. The phenomenon is vividly used by

Divakaruni in her novel *Queen of Dreams* to build a "cognitive environment" for its readers. Martin (2005) describes code-switching as "a structured system that allows the author to make shifts according to the situation and the effect he or she hopes to produce in a reader" (p. 404). Stroud (2004) defines code-switching as performativity where speakers (and authors) stage identities and social positions for certain audiences. He argues that literary code-switching in both spoken and written modes is strategic, implying position, affiliative purpose, or resistance. His research shows the code alternation in texts styled to achieve solidarity, irony, authority, or marginalization depending on context and audience expectations (p. 154).

The name "Chai House" illustrates the use of code-switching as an example of the blending of two languages by Divakaruni. The word *chai*, a Hindi term for "tea" that evokes the atmosphere of an Indian roadside tea stall, is combined with the English word *house*, which is commonly associated with Western-style coffee houses. This technique exemplifies the character's adaptation to a new world, as shown below.

"Belle and I had put everything we had into the Chai House..." (Divakaruni, 2004).

The name *Chai House* functions as an inferential communicator for readers, signaling its background knowledge to interpret the intended meaning. According to Lahiri (2014), once you accept the "word for foreign food" of another cultural group, you have broken down the initial barrier and are on your way to accepting a different culture (p. 28).

Another example from the book is the word *Kurma House* used in the following line.

"I trace the letters, then begin to fill them in. *Kurma House*. My father is the author of this name. He likes the pun, the idea of a word hidden beneath another word..." (Divakaruni, 2004).

Here, the word *Kurma* initially refers to a well-known Indian dinner dish that is culturally specific and serves as the story's anchor in South Asian customs. However, the word, as the father says, has been used as a hidden resonance and just for a pun, although the dish is "something we don't plan to serve" (Divakaruni, 2004).

On the other hand, Darlow (2012) recounts a mythological story about the name Kurma (IPA kurmə) in Hindu mythology, where *Kurma* is the incarnation of the Supreme Being, Lord Vishnu, who takes the form of a tortoise to support the earth on his back. Therefore, Divakaruni's use of the term "Kurma" in Kurma House has a resonance that extends beyond its obvious culinary implications, serving as a marker for code-switching that connects myth, memory, and identity within the story's diasporic setting.

4.3. Plural Marker

The use of the plural marker as an expression provides a distinctive form of bilingualism that can be classified as a grammatical phenomenon. In most languages, the use of the plural generally determines whether a construction is grammatically correct or not (Chakravarty, 2018). However, sociolinguistic analyses of natural language suggest that many words and structures found in written texts reflect patterns of informal speech, which do not follow rigid grammatical conventions and spellings (Stubbs, 1991). Similarly, this study has found that plural words are being used to overgeneralize Hindi words as part of bilingualism.

Words related to music and food serve as examples that are not translated into English, thereby enriching the bilingual texture of the text. Food items such as *pakora*, *singara*, *sandesh*, *jilebi*, *beguni*, *nimki*, and *mihidana* (Divakaruni, 2004) exemplify referential code-switching without translation, compelling readers to engage with cultural knowledge. These food items act as referential code-switching devices and also illustrate how the author promotes the use of the source language over English. Similarly, artistic markers of music such as *Bhangra* and *Ghazal* are mentioned as follows.

"She finds herself among a group of people who are dancing bhangra" (Divakaruni, 2004).

... "Someone recites an Urdu ghazal about loss and heartbreak and how good friends and happy memories can help us get through them" (Divakaruni, 2004).

The first excerpt is taken from the novel when Rakhi encounters people dancing *Bhangra*, a folk dance of Punjab. Both words *Bhangra* and *Ghazal* are directly incorporated into the text as a form of untranslated cultural code-

switching. In the second excerpt, the word *Ghazal*, a poetic form associated with the themes of three Ls: love, longing, and loss, is mentioned. The untranslated reference to music here creates a “cognitive environment” regarding the cultural traditions in the realm of entertainment.

“Pujas to keep the planet Shani from casting his evil eye on us” (Divakaruni, 1999).

“I packed away my good saris and my wedding jewelry, ate only one meal a day, no fish or meat, fasted, and prayed for what?” (Divakaruni, 1999).

Divakaruni incorporates an Indian cultural practice into the grammatical framework of English by using the plural marker “s” at the end of *pujas* and *saris* in *Sister of My Heart*. This illustrates a form of bilingualism where the vocabulary of one language adopts the structure of another. By pluralizing *puja* in the first example it demonstrates that the aunt regularly performs such ceremonies (*puja* as a ritual). “...amulets and soothsayers and weekly *pujas*” (Divakaruni, 1999), aimed at countering Shani’s adverse effects, highlights her devotion and reliance on daily rituals. In another dialogue, the word ‘*sari*’ (a traditional Indian garment), with the English plural suffix, results in the hybrid form *saris*, exemplifying linguistic mixing in diasporic writing. The words relate to Pishi when she mourns returning to her parents’ home after widowhood, where packing away her ‘good saris’ underscores her cultural dislocation and personal grief.

“It was always pasta and pizza, and, Oh Mom, not alu parathas again! when you were growing up” (Divakaruni, 2004).

In the dialogue from *Queen of Dreams*, the word *parathas* highlights how often Rakhi has to eat them because her mother prepared them for her. At the same time, the casual way Rakhi dismisses *alu parathas* reflects the typical spoken manner in Indian households.

Thus, Divakaruni’s novels use plural markers as a linguistic device to imitate spoken language in written form. Like in oral communication, these markers depend on shared linguistic and cultural knowledge to connect everyday speech with narrative texts. Additionally, pluralizing Indian vocabulary enhances the novels’ overall aesthetic and cultural appeal and makes the characters’ voices more realistic, spontaneous, and informal.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis in the article examined the function of literary bilingualism in two works by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Furthermore, by incorporating three categories of bilingualism, namely prama markers, code-switching, and plural markers, it is suggested that the literary discourse in diasporic writing serves to create a cognitive mutual environment for readers to engage with and understand the text. Additionally, exploring the theme of bilingualism within the framework of relevance theory reveals that, through the use of native words in English writings, diasporic writers establish literary spaces where different linguistic worlds coexist (Martin, 2005). By challenging monolingual conventions, the blending of languages also enables writers to express the complexity of memory, displacement, and belonging while providing a voice for marginalized identities (Trousedale, 2010). The analysis of the two texts concludes that, beyond creating a cognitive environment, a text also functions as a medium for liberation not only for the characters but also for the author as it embraces border language through the amalgamation of two or multiple languages with diasporic experiences of cultural rootedness. Thus, this study demonstrates that literary bilingualism enhances the accessibility and impact of these novels, thereby improving their readability and cultural richness.

5.1. Study Limitations and Further Recommendations

Nonetheless, this study primarily concentrates on the linguistic approach to bilingual expressions in Divakaruni’s two major diasporic novels. Given that Divakaruni is also well-versed in poetry and mythology, future research could be expanded to include her short stories, poetry, or other narrative works that further emphasize the use of bilingual expressions. Comparative analyses involving other diasporic writers who employ bilingual or multilingual strategies could also enhance academic discussions. Furthermore, adopting analytical frameworks beyond cognitive linguistics,

such as discourse-pragmatics, sociocultural semiotics, or narratology, might offer deeper insights into the use of multilingualism in contemporary global literature.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Disclosure of AI Use: The authors used Grammarly for grammar correction and clarity in structure. All suggestions generated by the tool were manually reviewed, evaluated, and incorporated at the authors' discretion. No AI tool was used for the development of the study's content, analysis, or research findings.

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