

Reconsidering Chomsky's Linguistic Internalism: The Cognitive Representation of Local Knowledge in the Sasak Ethnic Community as Reflected in *Wasiat Renungan Masa Pengalaman Baru* by TGKH Zainuddin Abdul Madjid

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Abstract

The local knowledge of the Sasak ethnic community embedded in the manuscript *Wasiat Renungan Masa Pengalaman Baru (WRMPB)* by TGKH. Zainuddin Abdul Majid has predominantly been examined through external sociological and anthropological perspectives. Such conventional approaches tend to overlook the mental-biological capacities underlying the formation and interpretation of the text. This study aims to deconstruct and remap the representation of Sasak local knowledge through the lens of Noam Chomsky's philosophy of language, particularly the paradigms of methodological naturalism and linguistic internalism. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a structural-computational orientation using a library research method. The data consisted of textual units, phrases, and poetic stanzas from the WRMPB manuscript representing Sasak local knowledge. The data were collected using cognitive data cards and validated through theoretical triangulation. The findings demonstrate that the manifestation of Sasak local wisdom in WRMPB as densely reflected in selected poetic stanzas is not merely a passive record of external social conventions based on stimulus-response mechanisms. Rather, it represents the expression of complex competence and the internalization of the speaker's cognitive grammatical system within the mind-brain. The WRMPB text internally organizes the semantic dimensions of local knowledge including educational emancipation, the preservation of institutional trust, moral metaphors, and the ethics of scholarly spirituality through distinctive syntactic structures. By integrating Chomsky's theoretical framework, Sasak local knowledge in WRMPB is reconceptualized as a form of I-Language (Internal Language) that is structured, rational, and grounded in biological-mental processes. This internal linguistic system enables the transformation of external empirical experiences into fundamental pillars of a holistic and enduring civilization.

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1. INTRODUCCION

Critical studies on local wisdom and local knowledge in the Indonesian archipelago have generally been dominated by the theoretical assumptions of externalist perspectives. This paradigm regards language and culture merely as products of social institutions governed by societal conventions (Wagiran, 2010; Sartini, 2006). Within the domains of macro-sociolinguistics and contemporary sociology of literature, cultural manuscripts

produced within communities are frequently treated as passive texts whose meanings are entirely shaped by external environmental conditioning or stimulus-response mechanisms.

However, when examined through Noam Chomsky's philosophy of Methodological Naturalism, such externalist approaches are considered theoretically fragile because they lack explanatory adequacy. They fail to account for the operation of the genuine cognitive system residing within the human mind-brain (Chomsky, 1981a; Collins, 2011). Chomsky argues that "public language" or externally shared social culture (E-Language) constitutes only a secondary abstraction with limited biological reality. Instead, rigorous linguistic inquiry should focus on I-Language (Internal Language), namely the speaker's internal cognitive state that enables the construction, comprehension, and creative expression of complex thoughts independently and productively (Chomsky, 1986).

One of the most significant religio-cultural textual artifacts in Eastern Indonesia is the poetic manuscript *Wasiat Renungan Masa Pengalaman Baru* (WRMPB), composed by Tuan Guru Kyai Haji (TGKH) Muhammad Zainuddin Abdul Majid, the founder of Nahdlatul Wathan (NW), the largest Islamic organization in the Province of West Nusa Tenggara. The WRMPB manuscript was written as a profound poetic reflection encompassing theological, ethical, political, historical, and Sasak local knowledge systems (Madjid, 1984). To date, WRMPB has largely been examined only from the perspective of its sociological and didactic functions. Little attention has been devoted to reconstructing how its internal linguistic structures represent the mental computational system through which the Sasak people conceptualize and organize their local knowledge.

Chomsky (1955–56/1975) proposes two fundamental properties of human language: Complex Competence and Universality. Human beings possess an innate capacity to generate highly complex and novel linguistic structures, together with a shared system of internal linguistic intuitions that operates independently of explicit external instruction. From this philosophical perspective, WRMPB may be understood as a manifestation of linguistic-cognitive performance constrained by the speaker's internal syntactic system while simultaneously expressing the Sasak community's semantic interpretation of empirical reality. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the representation of Sasak local knowledge in the WRMPB manuscript through a systematic integration of Noam Chomsky's philosophy of language, particularly his concepts of methodological naturalism and linguistic internalism.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative structural approach using a library research method. The formal object of the investigation was Noam Chomsky's philosophy of language, particularly his concepts of linguistic internalism and syntactic autonomy, while the material object consisted of the text of *Wasiat Renungan Masa Pengalaman Baru* (WRMPB), published by Bina Ilmu Offset (Madjid, 1984).

The research data comprised textual units, phrases, clauses, and poetic stanzas in the WRMPB manuscript that inherently represent the local knowledge of the Sasak ethnic community. The primary data source was the authentic WRMPB manuscript authored by TGKH. Muhammad Zainuddin Abdul Majid. Data were collected through a rigorous cognitive-based heuristic and hermeneutic reading, supported by a cognitive data-recording instrument. The data analysis proceeded through three stages: (1) structural reduction of the textual data, (2) categorization based on Chomsky's internalist parameters, particularly the analysis of internally constrained semantic structures, and (3) conceptual synthesis to identify the cognitive patterns underlying Sasak local knowledge.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the data were validated through theoretical triangulation, in which the empirical textual evidence was systematically

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compared with the principles of Chomsky's Universal Grammar and established theories of Indonesian local wisdom and cultural knowledge (Ibrahim, 1994; Rahyono, 2009).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Cognitive Dynamics of the Nahdlatul Wathan Organization within the Sasak Social System

From a historical and empirical perspective, TGKH. Muhammad Zainuddin Abdul Majid established Pesantren Al-Mujahidin in 1934 and Madrasah Nahdlatul Wathan Diniyah Islamiyah (NWDI) in 1937 in Pancor, East Lombok. These institutions represented an emancipatory educational movement aimed at liberating the Sasak people from the constraints of colonial illiteracy and intellectual deprivation. Through this educational initiative, a significant paradigm shift was achieved, transforming the Sasak community from a predominantly agrarian and traditional society into a literate community with an increasingly advanced intellectual culture (Madjid, 1973).

From the perspective of Chomskyan psycholinguistics, this remarkable increase in literacy cannot be adequately explained by B. F. Skinner's radical behaviorist theory, which assumes that the human mind is a passive tabula rasa shaped exclusively by external conditioning. Instead, the educational system developed by Nahdlatul Wathan appears to have successfully stimulated the Language Acquisition Device (LAD)—the innate biological faculty for language possessed by Sasak children. Such stimulation activated their Universal Grammar, enabling learners to transform limited environmental input into independent, creative, and computationally sophisticated intellectual capacities that fostered progressive learning and long-term competitiveness (Chomsky, 1957; Collins, 2011).

3.2 An Internalist Semantic Analysis of the WRMPB Poetic Stanzas

A systematic examination of the WRMPB manuscript identified a number of key poetic stanzas that encapsulate the core elements of Sasak local knowledge. These textual data reveal cognitive representations embedded within the linguistic structures of the manuscript. Based on the principles of Chomsky's linguistic internalism, the empirical findings were subsequently classified into a cognitive categorization framework to illustrate how the internal semantic organization of the text reflects the conceptual system underlying Sasak local knowledge.

No.	Source Stanza(s)	WRMPB Textual Excerpt	Chomskyan Internalist Analysis
01	Syair ke-43 Bagian ke-2	<i>"NW membuka lembaran sejarah mengangkat derajat PUTRA DAERAH Terbukti dalam diri anaknda menjadi USTADZ dan GURU SEKOLAH"</i>	The composite expression "Putra Daerah" ("sons of the region" or "native sons") does not refer merely to a literal physical or denotational identity. Rather, it encodes an internal mental representation of the transformation from objects of oppression into intellectually empowered subjects. From a Chomskyan internalist perspective, the expression reflects an internally structured conceptualization in which lexical meaning is generated by the

			speaker's cognitive system, rather than being determined solely by external social reference.
02	Syair ke-44 Bagian ke-2	<i>"Dan banyak pula Petugas Negara menjadi PENGHULU menjadi KEPALA URUSAN AGAMA, PENDIDIKANNYA PENERANGAN AGAMA PERADILANNYA"</i>	The internal syntactic structure constrains and organizes the semantic interpretation of the expansion of madrasah graduates into the sphere of modern legal and administrative institutions. Its semantic properties extend beyond the literal identity of traditional Islamic students, encoding an internal conceptualization of graduates as competent agents capable of participating in contemporary governance and public administration. From a Chomskyan internalist perspective, this meaning is generated through the speaker's cognitive-linguistic system rather than derived solely from external social conventions..

03	Syair ke-39 Bagian ke-2	<i>"Aduh sayang! Nahdlatul Wathan ciptaan ayahnda ku AMANATKAN kepada anaknda DIPELIHARA dan terus DIBINA..."</i>	The expression "Aduh sayang!" functions as a high-level cognitive operator that emphasizes the internal ideological commitment to institutional continuity and development throughout the Indonesian archipelago (Nusantara). Rather than serving merely as an emotional exclamation, the expression activates an internal conceptual structure that frames institutional expansion as a collective moral and intellectual responsibility. From a Chomskyan internalist perspective, its meaning is generated through the speaker's cognitive-linguistic system, where affective expression and ideological intention are integrated into a unified internal semantic representation.
04	Syair ke-134 Bagian ke-1	<i>"Tetapi banyak melupakan diri Tidak lagi berjiwa santeri Karena tertawan 'sambal terasi' Sampai lupa 'rumah sendiri'"</i>	The principle of syntactic autonomy constrains the semantic interpretation of the text: the idiomatic expression "sambal terasi" shifts from its literal denotation as a traditional food to a symbolic representation of worldly material temptations that erode the cognitive memory of one's identity, metaphorically expressed as "one's own home." From a Chomskyan internalist perspective, this semantic transformation is not determined by external reference alone but is generated through the speaker's internal cognitive-linguistic system, where idiomatic expressions encode abstract conceptual meanings beyond their literal lexical content.

05	Syair ke-180 Bagian ke-1	<i>"Murid durhaka pada gurunya Tidak terhapus dosa lengahnya Murid yang putus dari gurunya Berarti rusak pipa ilmunya..."</i>	The mechanical metaphor "rusak pipa ilmunya" ("the pipeline of knowledge is damaged") constrains the semantic interpretation of Sasak ethical values by portraying the transmission of knowledge as an internal spiritual and cognitive process rather than a mere transfer of external information or data. From a Chomskyan internalist perspective, the metaphor reflects an internally generated conceptual structure in which knowledge is understood as a product of the mind's cognitive architecture, emphasizing the integrity of intellectual and moral formation over the simple accumulation of externally acquired information.
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The following presents an in-depth theoretical elaboration of the data classification discussed above.

3.2 Educational Emancipation and Upward Social Mobility of the Sasak People

Consider the internal structure of Verse 43, Part 2, which contains the phrase "PUTRA DAERAH" ("sons of the region" or "local sons"). According to mainstream externalist semantics, a name or noun functions as a rigid designator referring to a physical object in the external world (Putnam, 1975). Chomsky (1996, 2000), however, rejects this perspective by arguing that words provide a set of internal conceptual perspectives through which the human mind flexibly interprets and discusses the world.

In the WRMPB text, the phrase "PUTRA DAERAH" is syntactically constrained by the predicate "menjadi USTADZ dan GURU SEKOLAH" ("to become Islamic scholars and school teachers"). This structure represents the operation of the Sasak speakers' mental grammar, which resists submission to colonial social conditioning. Internally, the phrase evolves into a symbol of struggle and the emergence of Lombok's indigenous intellectual class. This expansion of cognitive orientation is further reinforced in Verse 44, Part 2, where graduates of Islamic madrasah education are envisioned as occupying positions within modern bureaucratic institutions, including Penghulu (Islamic marriage registrar), Head of Religious Affairs, and the Judiciary. These findings demonstrate that Sasak local knowledge, as represented in the WRMPB manuscript, employs language as an instrument for the autonomous reconstruction of socio-cognitive identity.

B. Idiomatic Meaning Fixation through Syntactic Autonomy

The local wisdom of the Sasak people strongly emphasizes the moral resilience of Islamic students (santri) against character degradation. A particularly powerful poetic metaphor appears in Verse 134, Part 1:

*Yet many have forgotten themselves,
No longer possessing the spirit of a santri.
Captured by "sambal terasi,"
They even forget their own home.*

If linguistic semantics depended exclusively on external truth conditions, then the phrase "sambal terasi" would simply refer to a traditional Lombok chili paste made from fermented shrimp with its distinctive flavor. However, within the computational architecture of the Sasak speaker's mind while interpreting the WRMPB text, the syntactic autonomy of the sentence blocks such a literal interpretation. Instead, "sambal terasi" immediately undergoes an internal semantic shift, becoming a metaphor for trivial, inexpensive, yet addictive worldly temptations capable of corrupting one's spiritual idealism (the jiwa santeri, or the spirit of a santri).

The speaker's mind establishes a conceptual relationship between being captivated by insignificant material pleasures and the resulting deterioration of cognitive awareness of one's cultural and spiritual origins, expressed through the phrase "forgetting one's own home." This phenomenon of interpretive constraint supports Chomsky's claim that linguistic semantics is governed primarily by the internal grammatical architecture of the human mind rather than by independently existing external objects (Chomsky, 1955; Collins, 2011).

3.4. The Epistemology of Teacher–Disciple Ethics as a Channel of Spiritual Cognition

One of the most fundamental pillars of the Sasak people's religious local wisdom is the doctrine of ta'zim deep reverence and absolute obedience of students toward their religious teachers. This epistemological principle is linguistically anchored in Verse 180, Part 1:

*A student who separates from his teacher,
Means the conduit of knowledge has been broken.
The essence of knowledge has been burned away,
Consumed by Satan and worldly desires.*

Through the use of vivid mechanical-biological metaphors namely the nominal expressions "the conduit of knowledge has been broken" and "the essence of knowledge has been burned away" the WRMPB manuscript presents the internal epistemological structure of Sasak culture. Knowledge is not conceptualized as an external quantitative commodity transferred mechanically from teacher to student. Rather, it is understood as a flow of spiritual energy whose blessing is sustained through an inner bond of reverence and respect.

When this internal relationship is severed, the student's cognitive system is assumed to undergo systemic failure. This internally constructed meaning functions to preserve scholarly ethics and the social order of knowledge transmission within Sasak society while protecting learners from intellectual arrogance driven by "Satan and worldly desires."

3.5 Deconstructing the Twin Earth Thought Experiment within the Reality of Sasak Society

The Twin Earth thought experiment proposed by Putnam (1975) argues that the meaning of a word is determined entirely by the external physical environment for example, the chemical substance H₂O on Earth versus XYZ on Twin Earth leading to the famous slogan that "meaning just ain't in the head." Chomsky (2000, 2003), however, deconstructs this claim by demonstrating that human beings categorize objects according to an innate cognitive essentialism embedded within the mind rather than according to the objective taxonomy of external science.

For example, people continue to refer to muddy river water as "water" because of its internally understood functional identity, yet they do not ordinarily call a cup of black coffee "water," even though approximately 99 percent of its chemical composition is

H₂O. Such judgments reflect internal conceptual organization rather than purely external chemical composition.

The educational revolution initiated through the WRMPB text by TGKH. Zainuddin Abdul Majid provides compelling empirical and cultural evidence supporting Chomsky's internalist framework. The remarkable success of the Nahdlatul Wathan (NW) educational movement in dramatically reducing illiteracy across Lombok resulted from the WRMPB manuscript's ability to reconstruct the collective mental grammar of the Sasak people concerning the significance of education and knowledge.

Local cognitive structures surrounding education were no longer passively anchored to the oppressive realities of colonial rule but were instead woven together with divine principles rooted in the teachings of Rabbul 'Alamin (the Lord of the Worlds). It was this profound internal cognitive transformation that fostered the emergence of a modern Sasak society characterized by religiosity, literacy, educational emancipation, and strong cultural resilience in responding critically to the challenges of globalization (Rahyono, 2009).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the theoretical analysis of Noam Chomsky's philosophy of language applied to the manuscript *Wasiat Renungan Masa Pengalaman Baru* (WRMPB) by TGKH. Muhammad Zainuddin Abdul Majid, several fundamental conclusions can be drawn.

the WRMPB manuscript is not merely a passive socio-cultural document but rather a sophisticated artifact of linguistic-cognitive performance that actively represents the local knowledge of the Sasak people. Its linguistic structures function as manifestations of an internally organized cognitive system through which cultural values, religious principles, and educational ideals are conceptualized and transmitted across generations.

the cognitive mapping conducted in this study demonstrates that the WRMPB text systematically constrains semantic interpretation through the operation of internal grammatical mechanisms. Local wisdom is linguistically encoded in expressions such as "Putra Daerah," which symbolizes educational emancipation and upward social mobility; "sambal terasi," which functions as an idiomatic metaphor for trivial yet spiritually destructive worldly temptations; and "pipa ilmunya" ("the conduit of knowledge"), which conceptualizes the ethical and spiritual continuity of knowledge transmission between teacher and disciple. These meanings are not derived primarily from external referential objects but from the internal syntactic and conceptual architecture of the human mind.

the integration of Chomsky's internalist perspective successfully challenges the dominance of cultural externalism by demonstrating that the resilience of Sasak civilization is fundamentally grounded in its internal linguistic system (*I-language*). Rather than passively reflecting external social realities, the cognitive structures embedded within the WRMPB manuscript actively transform external experiences into enduring cultural values. Consequently, the manuscript serves not only as a literary and religious text but also as evidence that language functions as an internal cognitive mechanism through which cultural identity, moral consciousness, and civilizational resilience are continuously constructed and sustained.

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