

The Language of Resistance in Wiji Thukul's *Nyanyian Akar Rumput*: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Milda Apriliana

Jurusan Teknik Perencanaan Wilayah dan Kota, Fakultas Sains dan Teknologi,
Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, Indonesia

mildaapriliana28@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to uncover the language strategies of resistance used by Wiji Thukul in his poem *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* through a critical discourse analysis approach. Data obtained from the poem's text as the primary source are analyzed using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework, which encompasses aspects of text, discourse practice, and social practice. The results of the study indicate that the symbol "grassroots" represents the common people who possess collective resilience and strength in facing it. Metaphors are used to construct an image of injustice while simultaneously sowing a spirit of resistance, while calls and appeals function to form a collective awareness. The choice of simple yet meaningful diction strengthens the emotional connection between the poet and his readers. These findings emphasize that language in *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* serves not only as a means of aesthetic expression but also as a political instrument to articulate a counter-discourse against the dominance of power and drive social change.

Keywords: Language of Resistance, Wiji Thukul, *Nyanyian Akar Rumput*, Critical Discourse Analysis, Collective Consciousness

INTRODUCTION

Literature is an important medium for voicing human experience, reflecting social realities, and shaping critical public awareness. More than just an aesthetic work, literature often serves as a means of resistance against injustice, betrayal, and authoritarianism. In the Indonesian context, literature has a long history as an instrument of political and social struggle, particularly when freedom of expression is restricted. Ratna (2013) states that literary works not only provide entertainment but also contain moral, social, and political values that can influence public thinking. The role of this strategy is clearly visible in the works of writers born under the New Order regime, where language often became a symbolic weapon against repression.

Wiji Thukul is a poet who consistently uses poetry as a tool for people's struggle. Born in Solo on August 26, 1963, he grew up in a social reality rife with inequality and repression. Through his works, Wiji Thukul voices the aspirations of the common people who are often ignored by those in power. His courage in fighting injustice makes him a symbol of cultural resistance against repressive regimes (Kompasiana, 2024). One of his monumental works is *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* which captures the collective spirit of the people to fight oppression. The metaphor of "grassroots" in this poem reflects the resilience and strength of the common people who, though often underestimated, have the power to grow and resist.

Recent research demonstrates the relevance of *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* in the study of resistance literature. Haslinda (2023) analyzed the collection of poems through stylistic and semiotic approaches, finding that Wiji Thukul's style of language was effective in conveying ideological messages about the suffering and struggles of the common people. Similar findings were also expressed by Maramis, Itaristanti, and Mulyaningsih (2024), who highlighted the use of metaphor, personification, irony, and repetition as reinforcements of the poems' rhetorical power. Furthermore, Salamah (2025) examined the poems in *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* (Grassroots Songs) as a medium of popular propaganda communication, capable of stirring collective consciousness to resist oppression.

Theoretically, this poem is interesting to analyze using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. According to Fairclough (1995), language is a social practice bound by power relations and ideology, while van Dijk (2008) asserts that discourse can shape and influence social structures. This view aligns with Halliday (1994), who emphasized that every language choice carries a specific ideological value. In the context of the poem *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* the language used not only serves to convey an aesthetic message but also serves as a tool to expose unjust practices and mobilize public awareness.

The historical context of this poem's birth adds weight to its study. Written during the New Order era, *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* captures the pulse of popular resistance in a repressive political climate, where criticism of the government could lead to intimidation, imprisonment, or enforced disappearance. Wiji Thukul himself was a victim of enforced disappearance in 1998, the truth of which remains unknown (Herlambang, 2013). Therefore, this research is not only academically relevant but also has historical value as an effort to immortalize the traces of resistance through literature.

Based on this description, the study of the language of resistance in the poem *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* through a Critical Discourse Analysis approach is significant. This research is expected to reveal how the language structure, choice of diction, and rhetorical strategies in the poem are used to articulate the ideology of resistance, dismantle power relations, and broaden understanding of the role of literature as an instrument of social struggle in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This approach was chosen because the study aims to uncover the meaning, ideology, and strategies of resistance contained in literary texts, specifically the poem *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* by Wiji Thukul. CDA views language not merely as a means of communication but also as a medium for constructing, maintaining, and challenging power (Fairclough, 2018; Wodak & Meyer, 2020). The primary data source for this study is the text of the poem *Nyanyian Akar Rumput*, chosen because it contains a strong message of resistance against social injustice and oppression. Secondary data include books, scientific articles, and previous research discussing Wiji Thukul's work, critical discourse analysis, and studies of resistance literature (Ratna, 2023).

Data collection was conducted through documentation studies by collecting the text of the poem *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* from official publication sources by Wiji Thukul, compiling scientific references related to critical discourse analysis theory, Wiji Thukul's biography, and studies of resistance literature, and noting every diction, figure of speech, and language structure that indicates social resistance and a particular ideology. Data analysis was conducted using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model (2018) which includes three dimensions. First, textual analysis that identifies vocabulary, sentence structure, style, and rhetorical devices in the poem. Second, discourse practice analysis that examines the process of production and consumption of the poem, including the socio-political context of

Indonesia at the time of writing. Third, social practice analysis that examines the relationship between language in the poem and the power structure and social struggles during that period.

Data validity was maintained through source and theoretical triangulation. The poetry text was verified against official publications by Wiji Thukul, while the theoretical analysis was compared with the perspectives of literary, linguistic, and cultural studies experts (Sugiyono, 2022). This step is expected to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, ensuring accurate and academically accountable results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Meaning of Poetry Nyanyian Akar Rumput

Puisi Nyanyian Akar Rumput

(Karya Wiji Thukul)

Jalan raya dilebarkan
kami terusir
mendirikan kampung
digusur
kami pindah-pindah
menempel di tembok-tembok
dicabut
terbuang
Kami rumput
butuh tanah
dengar!
Ayo gabung ke kami
Biar jadi mimpi buruk presiden!

Translate

Grassroots Song Poem

(By Wiji Thukul)

The highway is widened
We are evicted
We build villages
We are evicted
We move around
We cling to walls
We are uprooted
We are thrown away
We are grass
We need land
Listen!
Come join us
Let it be the president's nightmare!

The poem “*Nyanyian Akar Rumput*” by Wiji Thukul voices the screams and persistence of small people who have lost their homes due to the flow of development and infrastructure

projects. In the verses, their deep longing is implied to return to having rights to land and to live in a decent and humane environment.

Wiji Thukul's poetry represents a symbolic form of resistance against the hegemony of power through the use of straightforward, repetitive language, and laden with ideological meaning. Within the framework of critical discourse analysis, the poet's chosen language serves as an instrument to challenge social injustice and dismantle power relations that oppress the common people. The choice of simple yet firm diction reflects an effort to build solidarity and collective awareness among readers, especially those who have directly experienced the impact of eviction and marginalization. This poetry is not merely an aesthetic expression, but also a medium of resistance that invites the audience to question the dominant narrative of development that often ignores people's rights.

In his poem *Nyanyian Akar Rumput*, Wiji Thukul uses politically charged lexical elements to express the language of resistance. Dictionaries such as "*grassroots*," "*exiled*," and "*struggling*" emphasize the position of the marginalized and displaced common people. Grammatically, the use of imperative sentences and repetition serves to reinforce the message of rejection of social injustice and emphasizes the demands for rights that have been ignored by those in power. Furthermore, rhetorical styles such as metaphor and symbolism serve as effective media for depicting the harsh realities experienced by the people, while simultaneously arousing empathy and critical awareness in the reader. Through this linguistic construction, the poem not only represents the objective conditions of oppressed people but also becomes an arena for discursive battles to break through the dominance of official narratives that often ignore the voices of the common people.

Discourse of Resistance in Nyanyian Akar Rumput

Wiji Thukul's poem, "*Nyanyian Akar Rumput*," provides a clear depiction of the structural violence experienced by low-income communities due to development practices that frequently disregard their existence. The poet's word choices, such as "*expanded*," "*displaced*," "*evicted*," and "*uprooted*," represent the coercive actions of those in power. In academic literature, this diction is recognized for not only illustrating physical violence but also systemic violence integrated into developmental policies that have the potential to oppress and marginalize certain segments of society (Saragih & Rohman, 2023; Ifra et al., 2025). Furthermore, various studies have shown that the language of this poem portrays the harsh reality of modernization processes, in which the basic rights of communities are often sacrificed for the sake of larger development interests (Maramis et al., 2024; Mahuze & Dewi, 2025).

The phrases "*we moved around*" and "*sticking to the wall*" in the poem convey the dimensions of powerlessness and uncertainty experienced by displaced communities. The language of the poem creates a profound image of unstable living conditions, where individuals lack a permanent home, forcing them into a constant state of migration and temporary occupation of limited spaces (Saragih & Rohragih & Rohman, 2023; Ifra et al., 2025). These expressions reinforce the imagery of suffering and marginalization, indicating the significant psychological impact of these conditions (Maramis et al., 2024; Mutia, 2024). Through an analysis based on the experience of injustice, the poem emphasizes that the resistance it portrays is rooted in the reality of marginalized communities whose rights are not recognized (Kori, 2023; Ifra et al., 2025).

The symbolism in the phrase "*We are grass, we need land*" holds a deep meaning. Grass represents ordinary people who are easily trampled on and often ignored, yet who demonstrate resilience amid pressure (Kori, 2023; Haslinda, 2023). This grass metaphor

shows a duality of vulnerability and strength, indicating that while these communities are frequently underestimated, they possess an undeniable power that cannot be disregarded by those in authority (Maramis et al., 2024; Mutia, 2024). Wiji Thukul thus not only imparts a lesson about the search for the right to land and proper housing but also encourages readers to recognize the collective potential of marginalized communities (Ifra et al., 2025; Mahuze & Dewi, 2025).

In the context of a call for solidarity, the imperative sentences *"Listen! Join us"* become a powerful call for social mobilization. This is not merely an invitation but a rallying cry for action that underscores the importance of active participation in the fight against injustice (Saragih & Rohman, 2023; Ifra et al., 2025). The direct and urgent language here serves as a tool to awaken collective consciousness and foster the solidarity that is essential in the face of oppression (Saragih & Rohman, 2023; Mutia, 2024). Furthermore, the phrase *"Let it be the president's nightmare!"* depicts a courageous resistance to power, showing that the voice of the people will never be insignificant and has the potential to shift existing structures of dominance (Kori, 2023; Ifra et al., 2025; Mahuze & Dewi, 2025). This demonstrates that a poem is not just an aesthetic work but also a critical and strategic tool to shake up and deconstruct oppressive systems.

Symbolism and Metaphor as Discourse of Resistance

In the poem *"Nyanyian Akar Rumput,"* the symbol of *"grass"* holds a powerful and socially charged meaning. Grass is chosen to represent ordinary people, simple living things that are often overlooked yet possess extraordinary resilience. This aligns with the idea that poetry can serve as a reflection of complex human experiences, including the struggles and resilience of individuals within social and political contexts (Arcilla, 2024). The grass, which is easily trampled and uprooted but always grows back, mirrors the condition of the common people who frequently fall victim to development policies. This shows how poetry, as an art form, can give a voice to the marginalized and highlight the injustices they face (Joranger, 2023).

The *"grass"* symbol also carries a collective meaning, as grass grows in clumps, implying the importance of solidarity and unity among the people when facing pressure from those in power. The strength of the common people lies in their unity, much like grass, though small individually, when it grows together, it covers and enlivens the ground. This collective strength can also be seen in the context of poetry serving as a medium to depict shared identity and experiences in the face of challenges (Arcilla, 2024).

The *"grass"* metaphor in the line *"We are grass, we need soil"* illustrates the fundamental need of ordinary people for a decent living space. In this context, terms like *"expelled"*, *"severed"*, and *"uprooted"* reinforce the metaphorical image of the common people frequently becoming victims of eviction. This metaphor reflects the reality of injustice, where power cuts the "roots" of the community's life, both physically and socially (Arcilla, 2024). The dissemination of this message of injustice underscores how poetry can be a tool for expressing resistance and hope for a collective awakening amid oppression (Joranger, 2023).

However, the grass metaphor also carries a message of struggle: just as grass can grow back despite being repeatedly pulled out, the common people have the vitality and determination to keep fighting. Thus, this metaphor serves as both a depiction of suffering caused by injustice and a symbol of resistance and hope for a collective resurgence (Arcilla, 2024). In this way, poetry is not merely an artistic work but also a powerful representation of the collective struggle etched into the daily lives of marginalized people. Throughout this analysis, it is evident that symbolism and metaphor in the poem play a crucial role in depicting

the condition of the common people. Through these images, the poem can embrace various themes related to social justice and represent the struggles of individuals and groups against existing injustice.

Language as a Tool for Building Collective Consciousness

In the poem "*Nyanyian Akar Rumput*," the imperative sentence "*Listen! Come and join us*" marks a shift in tone from a mere description of suffering to a call to action. This form of appeal emphasizes the urgency of the situation and encourages readers to reject passivity. The choice of words like "*let's go*" and "*join*" conveys a sense of inclusivity, inviting everyone to become part of the struggle. This call is crucial for building a collective movement, transforming sadness and anger into a unified energy to fight injustice. In this context, Wiji Thukul uses simple yet profound language to convey a message of resistance against authoritarianism (Mutia, 2024; Ifra et al., 2025).

The language used by Wiji Thukul in this poem is designed to foster an awareness that the injustice experienced is not an individual problem but a shared one. Collective expressions like "*we*" strengthen a shared identity and emphasize that the suffering of ordinary people is a result of an unequal power structure. By positioning himself as part of the "*we*," the poet bridges the gap between writer and reader, creating a sense of togetherness in the struggle (Ifra et al., 2025; Mahuze & Dewi, 2025). Therefore, the language in this poem serves as a political medium that fosters solidarity, connects personal experiences with collective interests, and nurtures the awareness that change is only possible through unity and collective action.

The poem "*Nyanyian Akar Rumput*" features language that directly challenges the legitimacy of power. The phrase "*Let it be the president's nightmare!*" is a brave statement, signifying that the voice of the common people can pose a real threat to those in power. The choice of the word "*nightmare*" carries the symbolic meaning that oppressive power will never be at peace as long as the people are united and resisting (Mutia, 2024; Ifra et al., 2025). This statement is not merely an emotional outburst but a political declaration that asserts the people's position as a counter-force to state authority. Thus, Thukul's work becomes a representation of the community's courage to resist injustice.

Additionally, the poet's use of a firm and direct tone, without disguise or euphemism, shows his courage in speaking out against injustice (Ifra et al., 2025; Mahuze & Dewi, 2025). This language serves to break the dominant narrative constructed by those in power and replace it with an alternative narrative that benefits the victims of oppression. By packaging resistance in a literary form, Wiji Thukul can convey a political message that not only touches the emotions of readers but also ignites the spirit for change (Mahuze & Dewi, 2025; Purnomo, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The poem "*Nyanyian Akar Rumput*" reflects the poet's commitment to the common people living under the shadow of oppression. Language is used as an instrument of resistance against oppression and social injustice. Through the symbol "grassroots," Wiji Thukul expresses the strength of the common people who continue to grow and survive despite pressure. The choice of simple yet meaningful diction allows the message of resistance to reach a wide audience, especially groups that are the subject of struggle. Metaphors play a crucial role in constructing an image of injustice and igniting the spirit of resistance, while calls and appeals serve as rhetorical strategies to mobilize collective consciousness. Critical discourse analysis shows that the poet's language structure, word choice, and narrative strategies serve

to strengthen his ideological position while forming a counter-discourse to the dominance of power. Thus, this poem is not only a literary work that records social reality, but also a political text designed to encourage change. *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* proves that language can be a strategic tool in building awareness, uniting the voices of the people, and affirming the identity of resistance. The author is aware of the many shortcomings in this article, so the author hopes that is hoped that future research will compare *Nyanyian Akar Rumput* with other works of resistance, examine its reception by readers from various circles, and examine its representation in other media such as music or theater. Intertextuality studies and cross-era discourse analysis are also important to observe the development of resistance language strategies, including through a critical sociolinguistic approach that links language choices to the socio-political context of the era.

REFERENCES

- Arcilla, F. (2024). Poetic devices, thematic significance, and social realities in poetry: A critical literature review. *Randwick International of Education and Linguistics Science Journal*, 5(1), 70-85. <https://doi.org/10.47175/rielsj.v5i1.935>
- Eriyanto. (2022). *Analisis wacana: Pengantar analisis teks media*. Kencana.
- Fairclough, N. (2018). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315834368>
- Haslinda. (2023). Analisis stilistika kumpulan puisi "Nyanyian Akar Rumput" karya Widji Thukul (Kajian Semiotika). *Journal of Education Research*, 4(3), 1315-1319. <https://doi.org/10.37985/jer.v4i3.340>
- Ifra, R., Kurniawati, K., Abrar, A., & Hardi, E. (2025). Otoritarianisme Orde Baru dalam karya puisi Wiji Thukul. *Jiip - Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 8(2), 1252-1259. <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v8i2.6828>
- Joranger, L. (2023). Healing and meaning making through storytelling and poetry. *Human Arenas*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-023-00375-1>
- Kori, K. (2023). Analisis makna kajian semiotika dalam buku puisi-puisi nyanyian akar rumput dari tiga puisi karya Wiji Thukul. *Bahtera Indonesia Jurnal Penelitian Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia*, 8(1), 278-289. <https://doi.org/10.31943/bi.v8i1.344>
- Kridalaksana, H. (2022). *Kamus linguistik* (Edisi revisi). Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Mahuze, Y., & Dewi, N. (2025). Puisi dan protes: Membongkar penindasan dan identitas poskolonial dalam puisi-puisi Okot P'Bitek dan Wiji Thukul. *Sintesis*, 18(2), 131-143. <https://doi.org/10.24071/sin.v18i2.10191>
- Maramis, M., Itaristanti, I., & Mulyaningsih, I. (2024). Penggunaan gaya bahasa dalam nyanyian akar rumput kumpulan lengkap puisi Wiji Thukul (Tinjauan stilistika). *Anufa*, 1(2), 189-200. <https://doi.org/10.63629/anufa.v1i2.43>
- Mutia, M. (2024). Analisis puisi "Peringatan" karya Wiji Thukul melalui pendekatan objektif. *JoLaLE*, 1(4), 255-263. <https://doi.org/10.70248/jolale.v1i4.1551>
- Purnomo, C. (2024). Literary ecocriticism study in analyzing elements of environmental and social resistance in Wiji Thukul's poems. *Els Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 7(4), 585-596. <https://doi.org/10.34050/els-jish.v7i4.42001>
- Ratna, N. K. (2023). *Teori, metode, dan teknik penelitian sastra*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Saragih, D., & Rohman, A. (2023). Nilai kemanusiaan dalam kumpulan puisi nyanyian akar rumput karya Wiji Thukul (Kajian sosiologi sastra). *Sentri Jurnal Riset Ilmiah*, 2(7), 2671-2677. <https://doi.org/10.55681/sentri.v2i7.1139>

Sugiyono. (2022). *Metode penelitian kualitatif, kuantitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.

Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2020). *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.