

## REGULATING LANGUAGE, RECTIFYING THE MIND: ZA'BA'S SYSTEM OF MALAY LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY

### Abstract

Research into the philosophy of the Malay language remains underdeveloped, as scholarly inquiry frequently prioritizes historical descriptions or adheres to the paradigms of Western language and linguistic philosophy. Consequently, the foundational concepts and philosophical systems articulated by indigenous scholars regarding the essence, nature, and societal role of the Malay language have been overlooked. This paper addresses this lacuna by reconstructing the Malay language philosophy formulated by Za'ba. Although Za'ba did not produce a dedicated philosophical treatise, his ontological perspectives on language are embedded within his seminal works. Employing a methodology of textual analysis, this study extracts Za'ba's philosophical framework through a rigorous examination of key terminology in *Pelita Bahasa Melayu* (1940-1946/2000). Furthermore, a linguistic historiography approach is utilized to trace the intellectual lineage of his formulations. The findings indicate that Za'ba's philosophy is predicated on the principle that language must be governed by orderly (*tertib*) grammatical laws (*undang-undang*) to facilitate the expression of correct (*betul*) meaning, rooted in the authentic (*jati*) Malay tongue. Within this framework, adherence to systematic grammar does more than ensure semantic accuracy; it serves as a reflection of a harmonious and disciplined intellect. This analysis further demonstrates that Za'ba aligned with the Herderian tradition, asserting that language is the primary force shaping human cognition and agency. Ultimately, in keeping with the spirit of *Kaum Muda* reformism, Za'ba's philosophical system posits that the intellectual rejuvenation of a nation is inextricably linked to the reform of its language.

**Keywords:** Za'ba, philosophy of language, grammar, Malay language, Herderian, reformism