

# THE ACEHNESE LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

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# The Acehnese Language and Society

*Editors:*

**Zulfadli A. Aziz**

**Yunisrina Qismullah Yusuf**

**Siti Sarah Fitriani**

**Dohra Fitrisia**

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**Editor:**

Zulfadli A. Aziz

Yunisrina Qismullah Yusuf

Siti Sarah Fitriani

Dohra Fitrisia

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**Email :**

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## **PREFACE**

Indonesia is a pluralistic nation, consisting of various ethnic groups throughout the country. Each tribe has its own language to communicate, both among ethnic and inter-ethnic groups. Language has an important role as a means of communication for humans to convey their intentions, and ideas, and express themselves in interactions in society. The Acehnese language is one of the regional languages in Aceh Province, one of the provinces out of 37 provinces in Indonesia. This language is one of the languages with the largest number of speakers in the province. It dominates in the acquisition of the language of the people in Aceh.

However, until now, few people know about the fundamentals of the Acehnese language. Structurally, the Acehnese language has many unique features. One of its uniqueness is the phonological aspect or the sound of the language. The Acehnese language has a higher number of phonemes when compared to other regional languages in Aceh, even Indonesian. Another of its uniqueness, for example, is in the aspect of vocabulary and how some word differences are seen in the varieties of Acehnese spoken throughout the province, country, and even those speakers who reside in other countries. There are also many social factors in Acehnese society that affect the meaning of a particular word or phrase in this language.

Therefore, we had invited researchers and practitioners to contribute to writing the book 'The Acehnese Language and Society', as part of the Universitas Syiah Kuala Press Book Series 'Language and Linguistics'. We thank any parties who are involved for their contribution, comments, and suggestions, both in very specific and very general ways. This book is dedicated to students, researchers, and any interested parties in Aceh who are concerned about the Acehnese linguistic subject matters.

Banda Aceh, July 2022

**Zulfadli A. Aziz**  
**Yunisrina Qismullah Yusuf**  
**Siti Sarah Fitriani**  
**Dohra Fitrisia**

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## CHAPTER 8

# Metaphors in the Acehnese Expressions upon Hearing the Death of a Muslim

Jarjani Usman<sup>\*1</sup> & Yusri Yusuf<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English Language Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,  
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh 23111, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Department of Indonesian Language Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,  
Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh 23111, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author: [jarjani@ar-raniry.ac.id](mailto:jarjani@ar-raniry.ac.id)

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Our daily speech becomes interesting because of many figurative languages, like metaphor, even though not all people are aware of it. A metaphor, an indispensable part of natural language, is a rhetorical device employed to facilitate understanding the meanings of complex things with things easy to understand (Edelman, 1971; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). When people talk about abstract and complex ideas, they use metaphors to make their interlocutors understand the intended meanings (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). The use of metaphors helps facilitate people's understanding of complex ideas, communicate efficiently, and persuade others (Thibodeau et al., 2019).

Many people do not realize metaphors in their utterances because of many possible reasons. Firstly, many metaphors of many types are hidden in abstract concepts (Lakoff, 1995; Kövecses, 2002). If known, it can help people understand the meanings conveyed in an utterance and use creative metaphors to facilitate understanding of a complex issue. Secondly, some of the metaphors are culturally specific. That is why some of the general metaphors can be understood by people of different cultures. Meanwhile, culturally specific metaphors are only used and understood by those who share the same culture (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2002). As such, the person, not a member of the culture, loses its meaning in the communication metaphor. For instance, an Acehnese saying reads, *buya krueng teudöng-döng*, *buya tamöng meuraseuki*, which literally means 'local crocodiles only



wait and see, while the new crocodiles take the benefits' (Usman & Yusuf, 2020). However, the meaning of the saying is different from the literal one. It embeds metaphors that dehumanize people as they (locals and newcomers) are animalized with *buya* 'crocodiles'. Its meaning is that local people are just watching the newcomers earn the benefits from local resources.

The literature indicates that there are many examples of the use of metaphors pervasive in life sectors, ranging from education to religion. For instance, in the Quran, many metaphors need correct translations to understand the meanings (Alhusban & Alkhawaldah, 2018). For example, in Islam, a *hadith* (a record of words, actions, and silent approvals of Prophet Muhammad as transmitted through chains of narrators) reads: 'This world is a haven'. To understand the rather difficult 'world', the word 'stopover' is utilized or selected as a familiar concept. The use of the word 'stopover' will make it easier for many people to understand how many use it in their daily lives. A stopover is short by nature, and a stopover is part of the long journey on earth. In this hadith, the stopover is used as a part journey to an eternal place, hereafter. We are expected to take a critical meaning and behave appropriately in this temporary world life from this metaphor. That is why a metaphor has a profound influence on explaining an idea.

The examples above pave the way for understanding the functions of metaphors in our lives. Among the vivid functions of a metaphor, as mentioned by Thibodeau et al. (2019), are to facilitate people in understanding complex topics, communicate efficiently, and influence others. The metaphor above, 'This world is a stopover' is an instance of metaphor that helps people understand the complex or abstract topic of life on earth. Therefore, the concrete word 'stopover' helps in understanding the nature of life on earth. By understanding the nature of life on earth, human beings will be more prepared when living on earth before death. While many studies on the metaphors of life on earth, research on death metaphors is few (Barker, 2000), therefore, this study focuses on the metaphors embedded in the expressions people in Aceh use when hearing one dies.

Understanding the language as expressions used for specific life events, such as the expressions to the dead, in a particular society is crucial. As Wierzbicka (1992, p. 22) points out, language is "the best mirror of the human mind", suggesting that the expressions reflect what they have in mind. In English, for instance, the most widely used expressions surrounding people's death are 'pass away' and 'rest in peace.' Death, according to the Christian faith (Uberman, 2016, p. 174), "is related to life and even though death is seen

as the end of life, they are conversely related as well, i.e., the death is considered to be the beginning of the new, eternal life". The expression 'rest in peace (RIP)' means death is resting. In this case, the word 'rest' is a verb; it is someone's prayer for those who have just died, 'wishing those who died had found right standing with God, and were now resting eternally with Him' and the word of 'peace' in the expression refers to heaven because death is commonly referred to as 'going home to heaven,' or 'going home to be with Jesus' (Bucher, 2019).

In Islam, death is conceptualized as not the end of life for human beings. It is a process of moving towards the third phase of life, following the human life phases in the mother's womb and on earth after having been born. It is a process of a long journey to eternal life in the hereafter, and all will return to God, Allah (Quran 6: 38). Hence, every Muslim is reminded to be well prepared for and contemplate the death that might come at an unexpected time. Believers need to believe in God and do good deeds during their short life on earth. Life is conceptualized as a journey to eternal life in the hereafter (Shokr, 2006). Therefore, a life that has ups and downs should be lived as best as possible because it is part of the long journey of eternal life. Similarly, death is also part of the long journey to the same destination.

The conceptions of life and death in Islam shape the ways Muslims think and act in their lives on earth. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how Muslim people in Aceh, where Islamic sharia has been implemented for several decades, conceptualize death as manifested in their expressions in the Acehnese language. To do so, this study intends to shed light on the metaphorical expressions Acehnese people use when hearing one dies through their conceptualization of how death is understood. This study argues that uncovering metaphors' meanings in the expressions can help people understand what it means to die, what needs to be prepared before dying, and how to live on earth as part of the preparation to die.

An abundance of previous studies on the use of metaphors exists in many disciplines. Among them are the analysis of metaphors in literary work (Lubis, 2019), dehumanizing metaphors in the Acehnese language (Usman & Yusuf, 2020), and political metaphors (Usman, 2017). These studies reveal that Acehnese people frequently use metaphors in daily life. However, to my best knowledge, research on metaphorical expressions of the death of a person is rare. Therefore, this study explores the conceptual metaphors embedded in the Acehnese people's expressions when finding a Muslim's death and how their concepts reflect the Islamic teachings they embrace.

## 2. FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE AND METAPHOR

Understanding metaphor as one of the figurative languages is worth knowing the distinctions between figurative and literal languages. A figurative language 'expresses one thing in terms normally denoting another with which it may be regarded as analogous' (Sakadolskis, 2003, p. 24). It encompasses many kinds of expressions, ranging from idioms, metaphors, metonymy, jokes, hyperbole, indirect requests, irony, and sarcasm, to stereotyped expressions, like clichés (Vulchanova et al., 2019). Vulchanova et al. (2019) also remind us that as figurative language is not transparent in meaning, it needs to go beyond the literal meanings of the constituent words to recover the intended meaning.

Differently, literal language refers to a language that conforms to the conventional order and meaning. Figurative language is vital for capturing ineffable ideas and concepts with no equivalence in the real world of experience (Berrade, 2006). According to Newmark (1988, as cited in Bojović, 2014, p. 75), "any word can be a metaphor, and to find out if it is, the primary meaning has to be matched against the linguistic and cultural contexts". Today, there are many widely-known figurative languages, including metaphor, simile, personification, allegory, etc. However, this paper only focuses on metaphors manifested in the expressions of the Acehnese people.

Many scholars have proposed the definitions of metaphor, and mostly they come up with similar meanings. Kövecses (2010, p. 4), for instance, defines metaphor as understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another. Maslo (2011) states that "metaphor is frequently described as using the known to explain the unknown" (p. 88). Edelman (1971, as cited in Mio, 1997), refers metaphor to as "devices for simplifying and giving meaning to complex and bewildering sets of observations and evoke concern" (p. 65); and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) define it as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another thing" (p. 5). Examples of a metaphor are 'argument is war' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), 'life is a journey' in the Quran, in which life is conceptualized as a process of the journey to the hereafter (Shokr, 2006), and 'John was a lion in the fight' (Kövecses, 2010).

It is clear from the examples that two concepts are involved in a metaphor. Concerning this, Dancygier and Sweetser (2014) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) elaborate that the target domain or topic talked about is often abstract, complex, subjective, intangible, or sensitive, while the other experience, whereas the source domain or a vehicle, is often more concrete, physical, tangible and accessible. In the example, 'John was a lion in the fight,' John's

quality fight is abstract, complex, subjective, intangible, or sensitive. Meanwhile, the source domain or vehicle 'lion' is concrete, physical, tangible, and accessible. Furthermore, to understand a metaphor's definition, a metaphor is commonly distinguished from a simile. However, to some extent, a metaphor is different from a simile in that a simile uses 'as' and 'is like' (Kövecses, 2002). This is clear when we compare the expressions 'He is a tiger' and 'He is like a tiger' or 'He runs like a tiger does'.

Moreover, a speaker can create a metaphor or take it from an existing repertoire in a specific culture. For instance, Trump created the metaphor 'swamp' to represent the US nation when he talked about his country's political condition. The 'swamp' metaphor was used to represent a particular type of physical location in grounding our understanding of political excess, stagnation, and corruption (Thibodeau et al., 2019). Differently, an Acehnese person merely takes a metaphor from a repertoire in the Acehnese culture when talking about a good or bad girl. It is common to find that Acehnese people use *boh lam ôn* (literally means 'fruit in a leaf') for a good girl or *kamèng keudèe* (literally means 'a shop goat') to refer to a bad girl. However, the meanings of cultural metaphors can only be understood by the members of that culture. Concerning this, Kövecses (2005) notes that metaphorical conceptualization patterns among cultures and languages are not entirely universal. Some metaphors are prevalent; others tend to be unique in specific communities of speech.

### 3. FUNCTIONS OF METAPHOR

As explained previously, a metaphor has many crucial functions, such as understanding complex topics, communicating efficiently, and influencing others (Thibodeau et al., 2019), or cognitive and communicative functions (Herrmann, 2013), or (conceptual metaphors) guiding daily thought and action (Landau et al., 2010). In the same vein, Demjén et al. (2016, p. 2) state that metaphor is "a powerful phenomenon, which can reflect conventional and implicit ways of thinking, and help to overcome, but also contribute to, communicative problems". Simply put, metaphor is instrumental in facilitating communication.

To serve these functions, a person usually uses a metaphor that takes a concrete concept familiar to the audience or a particular culture. For instance, Trump used the metaphor 'swamp' to describe the US nation (Thibodeau et al., 2019). In this example, Trump used the concept in his communication with the audience because he believes that everyone there is familiar with what a

swamp is, i.e., dirty water and many wild animals. In Aceh, Indonesia, local politicians use many metaphors, such as 'Partai Aceh is our own home', to enable people to understand complex political topics and persuade them to vote for the local political party, Partai Aceh (Usman, 2017). Similarly, politicians in many countries used metaphors to serve persuasive and rhetorical purposes and show their ideological position (Otieno, 2016) and sustain political power (Navera, 2011; Nuryatno, 2005).

#### **4. TYPES OF METAPHORS**

The literature indicates that there are many ways metaphors are categorized in various disciplines. Different scholars categorize metaphors differently. Some researchers differentiate metaphors into humanizing and dehumanizing metaphors (Bosmajian, 1984; Li, 2019; Musolff, 2015) because many metaphors use non-human beings to refer to humans, such as animals, plants, etc. Dehumanization means "the denial of a person's humanness" (Haslam, 2006, as cited in Adams et al., 2017, p. 247). Hence, the abstract concept of a person's behaviors, which is also called tenor, is conceptualized by using the concrete or more familiar concept of an animal's behavior, also called vehicle. However, not only animals are used in dehumanizing metaphors, some cultures, such as the Acehnese culture (see Usman, 2017; Usman & Yusuf, 2020) also use plants and inanimate entities.

Other scholars distinguish metaphors into structural metaphor, orientational metaphor, and nature metaphor. Firstly, a structural metaphor is a conventional metaphor in which one concept is understood and expressed in another structured, sharply defined concept (Maslo, 2011). Secondly, an orientational metaphor uses spatial orientation or preposition to describe one's feelings or time. A happy feeling, for instance, is portrayed with 'up', as in 'I am feeling up now', and a sad feeling with 'down', as in 'I am feeling down now'. The third type of metaphor is a nature metaphor, which refers to a metaphor that uses nature, such as a shining star, snow, ice, etc. For instance, 'Ronaldo is a shining soccer star'. President Trump gave another example in his oration, which also used nature to describe the condition of the U.S. government at that time, when he said, 'It is time to drain the 'swamp' in Washington, D.C.' (Thibodeau et al., 2019).

There are many other types of metaphors classified in the literature (e.g., Al-Hindawi & Al-Saate, 2016; Josef, 2008; Kemertelidze & Manjavidtze, 2011; Khumaira et al., 2019; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). However, different experts

classify them differently. Earlier scholars, Dagut (1976, as cited in Al-Garrallah, 2016) categorizes metaphors into three types, ephemeral metaphors of literature and journalism, semantically embalmed metaphors of literature, and metaphors taken up and used by many other speakers. Meanwhile, Newmark (1988) categorizes metaphors into six types: dead metaphor, cliché metaphor, stock or standard metaphor, adapted metaphor, recent metaphor, and original metaphor. And Van den Broeck (1981) categorize metaphors according to their forms: lexicalized metaphors, conventional metaphors, and private metaphors. Other types of metaphors used today include primary metaphors, complex metaphors, dead metaphors, creative metaphors, extended metaphors, absolute metaphors, conceptual metaphors, implied metaphors, active metaphors, ontological metaphors, and mixed metaphors (Kovecses, 2010). Hitherto, this study is concerned with conceptual metaphors.

#### **4.1 Conceptual Metaphor**

According to Lakoff (1993, p. 203), metaphor is “primarily conceptual, conventional, and part of the ordinary system of thought and language”. In the same vein, Al-Hindawi and Al-Saate (2016) state that metaphor is a matter of conceptualization rather than of language. However, metaphor is basically a communicative phenomenon arising from speakers’ intentions to express thoughts or feelings. Conceptual metaphor is also called cognitive metaphor (Deignan, 2005), which refers to the understanding of one conceptual domain, usually abstract, in terms of another domain, which is usually familiar to society. These kinds of metaphors shape the way we think and act. That is why a metaphor is said to involve three dimensions, including language, thought, and communication.

To further understand conceptual metaphor, it is necessary to compare it with the traditional view of metaphor. Regarding this, Al-Hindawi and Al-Saate (2016) compare and contrast them in the following ways. First, metaphor is a property of concepts, and not of words. Second, the function of metaphor is to better understand certain concepts; and not just for artistic or aesthetic purposes. Third, metaphor is not necessarily based on similarity. Fourth, metaphor is used effortlessly in everyday life by ordinary people, not confined to talented people. Finally, fifth, metaphor is an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning.

## 4.2 Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Previous studies show that there are many theories used to understand metaphors. Among them is the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), which was further developed by Lakoff and Kövecses (1987) and Grady et al. (1996). Understanding a metaphor based on the CMT needs three elements: source domain, target domain, and mapping (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Thibodeau et al., 2017). The source domain is the use of metaphors, the target domain is the concept of something, and the mapping is the characteristic of the source and target domains. For example, in the metaphor 'life is travel', the target domain is 'life', while 'travel' is the source domain.

In this regard, Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who coined the cognitive semantic metaphor, state that metaphor is inextricably related to our conceptual system's structure. It can be regarded as a tool for understanding how one perceives the world. According to them, in the cognitive semantic approach, metaphor is treated as "a cross-domain mapping that is pervasive in our thought and reflected in our daily use of language" (Li, 2019, p. 93). In analyzing a metaphor in a language, it needs "to examine the relationship between the surface linguistics and deeper conceptual meaning, and involves 'translation' from surface linguistic meaning to deeper cognitive and pragmatic meaning" (Charteris-Black, 2004, pp. 218-219). In this way, language awareness occurs.

Concerning the use of CMT, this study employed a qualitative approach to collect data by interviewing ten people in Aceh province. They were interviewed directly and by phone to know what expressions they commonly use when hearing about the death of a Muslim. The interviews were carried out informally to enable the respondents to talk freely. The interview started with probing questions such as, '*Kameuninggai* 'has died' is used to mean the person has died, correct? What are other expressions in the Acehnese language to refer to a person who has died?' The interviews were recorded using a mobile phone.

The data were then analyzed by using the CMT. In understanding the meaning of the respondents' metaphorical expressions, this study involved identifying the metaphors in the expressions used by the Acehnese people. After identifying the metaphors, they were analyzed based on the two domains suggested in the CMT by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). For instance, a respondent said, *Innalillahi wainna ilaihi rajiun*, an Islamic expression meaning 'verily we belong to Allah, and verily to Him do we return', that is used upon

hearing the death of a person. In this expression, two domains can be identified, that is, 'death' and 'return to Allah'.

## **5. ACEHNESE METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS OF THE DEAD**

This study attempted to identify and analyze the metaphors embedded in Acehnese people's expressions when they hear about a Muslim's death. Results showed that there are many metaphors in the Acehnese language that needs realization. The metaphors can be understood from the following expressions *kageuwoe bak Allah*, *kageutinggai geutanyoe*, *katrôk watêe*, and *kawafeut*.

### **5.1 *Ka Geuwoe Bak Allah***

The expression *ka geuwoe bak Allah* can be translated to 'he/she has returned to God'. In this expression, there are two domains, such as 'death' as the tenor or something expressed and 'journey' as the vehicle. This can be understood from the use of the word *kageuwo* (a verb in the Acehnese language that indicates something has occurred), which means 'one has returned'. 'Returning' is a journey from somewhere, and Allah is the destination of the journey. 'Return' also indicates a place of origin.

However, the death metaphor's journey is not similar to the journey during life on earth, as exemplified by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Some of the attributes of a journey during death are no longer available. Among them are the ups and downs of living in the tomb. It depends on the good deeds and sincerity during life on earth. Other attributes still exist, such as the deceased = the traveler, hereafter = the destination, and being in the tomb = a journey. Therefore, understanding the metaphors embedded in the expression is very valuable for Muslim people. This is so because it can shape cognition in people's minds about preparing for the life journey after death and hereafter.

### **5.2 *Ka Geutinggai Geutanyoe***

Likewise, *ka geutinggai geutanyoe* can be translated into 'he/she has left us'. In this expression, the word 'has left' is a verb phrase used to mean 'has died'. This expression compares two concepts, including 'death is leaving', or 'death is a journey' as in leaving is a part of a journey. Hence, the expression



embeds a metaphor of 'death as a journey'. However, this expression does not explicitly mention where the person goes.

This expression is also valuable for human beings because living together is not eternal. Therefore, living together peacefully on earth and respecting each other are necessary for this short life. Like or dislike, we are going to leave this earth.

### **5.3 *Ka Abéh Raseuki***

The expression *ka abéh raseuki* means the dead person has run out his/her earnings from his/her stock/wealth on earth. In this expression, there are two domains compared, including '*ka abéh raseuki*' and 'death'. This expression correlates life on earth and death because running out of his/her earnings means finishing all the resources allocated for him/her, such as meals, drinks, health, age, etc., while living on earth.

This expression is also precious for people who are still alive. It reminds people that each of us has been allocated with earnings or resources to live on earth. Moreover, we have continuously used them anytime to live, and we will run out of them at one time during which we will go to the next phase of life, i.e., death.

### **5.4 *Ka Abéh Umu***

The expression *ka abéh umu* means the deceased has run out his/her age. This expression compares two concepts, 'running out of age' and 'death'. To some extent, this is similar to the expression of '*ka abéh raseuki*'. Age, to the Acehnese, is one of the resources given by God to live on earth.

This expression is also crucial in shaping human minds about death. It reminds people about the allocated age as a valuable resource. Age is time, and time runs fast, whether it is used or not. Therefore, using age as efficiently as possible on the right things is necessary. Otherwise, we will run out of time.

### **5.5 *Ka Trok Watèe***

The expression '*ka trok watèe*' is also commonly used by the people in Aceh when hearing one dies. This expression means the 'time of death has arrived', which means that the predetermined time to die has come to the person. It also

means the time of ending his/her life on the earth by the Creator has come to him/her. Metaphorically, 'living on earth is time', and 'death is ending time'.

This metaphorical expression reminds us that we must leave this earth when the time to die has come. Therefore, before death comes, making preparation to deal with it, it is indispensable for every human being.

## **5.6 *Ka Meuninggai***

The expression *ka meuninggai* is also commonly used in Aceh society. It means (a person) has died or has passed away. This expression conveys a metaphor, 'death is leaving' as it has two concepts: 'death' and 'leaving'. 'Leaving' is the process of a journey towards the destination.

Overall, this study's findings show that the expressions used by the Acehnese people are more or less similar, in that they embed the metaphor 'death is a journey'. The findings suggest that the metaphorical expressions are used to reflect the Islamic sources embraced by Muslims worldwide: the Quran and As-Sunnah. In Islam, death is part of the journey to the hereafter.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the various metaphors related to death used in expressions for one's death in the Acehnese language are dominated by the metaphor of 'death is a journey'. This finding is inseparable from the influence of Islam's teachings adhered to by the Acehnese that the hereafter is the goal of every human being. In Islam, death is the gate to the afterlife.

However, it is essential to note that Acehnese society's metaphorical expressions researched in this study are only those used by the Acehnese language speakers in relation to a Muslim's death. The metaphorical expressions related to death in other languages spoken in Aceh Province, such as Gayonese, Alas, Jamee, etc., are not within the scope of this study. Therefore, further studies on the comparison of the metaphorical expressions in those languages are recommended to be done to further understand the metaphors of death used by the people in this province.

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## THE AUTHORS



**JARJANI USMAN** is currently a senior lecturer at the Department of English Language Education, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. He holds a Ph.D. from Deakin University, Australia, and a Master of Science (MS) from Texas A&M University, USA, and another Master's (M.Sc.) degree from University of Twente, The Netherlands. His B.A. degree (S.Ag.) was from Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, and another B.A. degree (SS/Sarjana Sastra) was from Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta. He has published many articles in several international reputable journals, such as Sage Open, The Qualitative Report, Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics, Studies in English Language and Education, and many nationally accredited journals. He is a reviewer for several Scopus-indexed journals, such as Heliyon (Scopus Q1), Education and Information Technologies (Scopus Q1), Studies in English Language and Education Journal (Scopus Q1), Frontline Learning Research (Scopus Q1), and Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education (Scopus Q2).



**YUSRI YUSUF** is a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. He obtained his Ph.D. from Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. During his academic career, he has held positions as the Secretary at the Department of Language and Arts and the Chairman of the Department of Indonesian Language and Literature Education at Universitas Syiah Kuala. He was also the Head of the Aceh Provincial Adat Council Secretariat. He is now the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the Indonesian Institute of Cultural Arts in Aceh,

Indonesia. His research interests are in education, linguistics, and local wisdom.