Metaphors of mourning in Acehnese culture: A conceptual mapping analysis

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ABSTRACT

Death is a universal phenomenon shared by all human beings, yet its interpretation through language simultaneously reflects both universality and cultural diversity. Across societies, death metaphors reveal deep-seated worldviews and values, showing how people everywhere grapple with mortality while expressing it in distinct cultural forms. This study aims to analyze Acehnese metaphors of death, highlighting their cultural significance and the ways in which they convey beliefs, emotions, and social attitudes. Employing qualitative methods and purposive sampling with interviews of 10 informants, the data were analyzed using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The findings revealed 17 metaphors surrounding death in Aceh, with 10 conveying positive connotations that reflect a cultural inclination to find solace and meaning amid loss, framing death as a transformative journey or a return to the Creator. Positive expressions, commonly used in religious recitations, consolatory speech at funerals, and everyday conversations about loss, included phrases like *geutinggai tanyoe* [left us], *geuwoe bak Tuhan* [gone home to God], *geucok pulang* [been taken back by God], *geujak* [departed], and *geupeulikôt dônya* [turned his/her back to the world]. Conversely, 7 negative metaphors highlight emotional challenges and societal fears. Impolite terms such as *maté* [is dead], *keumah* [is done/finished], and *wabah kireueh* [scraped by a plague] carry negative connotations and lack the respect typically associated with discussions of death. The study also highlighted the use of figurative language by adults when explaining death to children, including phrases like *geujak* [he/she has gone] and *jak beuet* [gone to study (the Qur'an)]. Given the study's qualitative scope and reliance on ten purposively selected informants, the findings should be viewed as culturally specific insights rather than universally generalizable claims. These limitations mean that the results capture in-depth cultural meanings within Acehnese society but may not fully represent the diversity of individual experiences or be generalized across other cultures. Nonetheless, they underscore the value of localized metaphor analysis in revealing how communities linguistically frame universal human experiences such as death.

Keywords: Acehnese; conceptual mapping; cultural analysis; death metaphors

INTRODUCTION

Death is the completion of life (Airaksinen, 2019), marked by the cessation of essential life functions, including heartbeat, brain activity, and respiration. It signifies the culmination of life's journey and the end of an individual's physical existence. The death of a loved one, or even 'nonfinite' loss through relational betrayal, personal injury, career loss, or relinquishment of life-defining goals, can disrupt the basic narrative of our lives (Thompson & Neimeyer, 2014). As a fundamental aspect of the human condition, death serves as a reminder of life's fragility, urging individuals to seek meaning, purpose, and connection during their limited time on Earth. (Frankl, 2017; Yalom, 2008). Despite its universality, the ways in which death is

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linguistically represented differ across cultures, reflecting unique worldviews and social values. However, studies on Acehnese death metaphors remain limited, creating a gap in understanding how Acehnese society conceptualizes and communicates this fundamental human experience. This gap forms the basis for the present research.

World languages are rich in metaphors depicting the elusive concept of death, reflecting both universality and cultural diversity. In Tibetan traditions, death is framed as separation from loved ones (He et al., 2020), while the Kajang of Indonesia conceptualize it as a journey to the afterlife (Maruf & Tanduk, 2021). In Japanese, a wide range of euphemistic verbs for shinu 'die' indexes cultural norms of politeness and facework, and Shinto–Buddhist perspectives often cast death as a spiritually guided transition (Okuyama, 2013; Sakaba & Habib, 2025). Across Africa, Yorùbá proverbs and beliefs construe death as transformation and continued existence among ancestors, and EkeGusii euphemisms instantiate Death as a Journey and Death as Rest (Jegede & Adegoke, 2016; Nyakoe et al., 2012). These examples illustrate that although the experience of death is universal, its metaphorical framing varies with local worldviews and values. Within this broader landscape, little is known about how Acehnese culture constructs and communicates death. This study addresses that gap using Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

The study of metaphors reveals how we comprehend complex thoughts through familiar experiences, illuminating cultural, emotional, and experiential dimensions while significantly impacting perspectives across various fields (Golfam et al., 2019). The concept of 'conceptual metaphors' establishes a connection between language and thought. These representations, deeply rooted in cognition, grasp abstract concepts by relating them to concrete experiences. This perspective highlights the deep cultural and experiential influences on our conceptualization of reality, emphasizing the role of metaphors in shaping our perception of the world (Fischer & Marquardt, 2022).

Metaphors are inherent to human expression across languages and cultures, including local languages such as Acehnese, which is spoken in Aceh, Indonesia, a region well known for its strong Islamic traditions and rich cultural heritage. Aceh, with its rich cultural heritage, offers insights into various ways death is conceptualized and expressed (Astuti, 2017). The Acehnese language contains terms that capture the nuances of mortality, reflecting the cultural values, spiritual beliefs, and emotional depths of its speakers (Usman & Yusuf, 2022). Thus, metaphors in Acehnese, like those in other languages, encompass all aspects of life, including death. Acehnese speakers use various

expressions to describe death, such as *maté* 'die', *meuninggai* 'leave', *abéh umu* 'life is gone', and *geuwoe bak tuhan* 'has gone home to God' (Usman &Yusuf, 2022). Many of these expressions are shaped by Islamic teachings, particularly the belief that life and death are determined by God's will, with death often framed as a return to the Creator. This religious influence underscores the cultural foundation of Acehnese death metaphors and connects directly to the research question of how Acehnese speakers linguistically conceptualize mourning and mortality.

Numerous studies explore metaphors elucidating the concept of death globally. For instance, Demjén et al. (2016) examine healthcare professionals' terminology to describe 'good' and 'bad' aspects of death in the UK. Another study focused on the Tibetan ethnic group in China, involving 385 participants, revealed that 'separation from loved ones' is the most frequently used expression to depict death in that region (He et al., 2020). Similarly, the Kajang tribe views death as a soul's journey to the afterlife, where good souls receive rewards (Maruf & Tanduk, 2021). These observations support a cross-linguistic study that found 'death is a journey' to be the most predominant metaphor across six languages, including Chinese, Farsi, and Swedish (Gathigia et al., 2018).

Within the Indonesian context, metaphors of death also reveal distinct cultural and religious values. Januarto (2019) found that Indonesian Muslims often perceive death positively, framing it as rest, a journey, a helper, and a gift, with the dominant metaphor being 'death is life.' Usman and Yusuf (2022) identified six metaphors specific to the Acehnese language, highlighting how local linguistic traditions embody the community's cultural and spiritual perspectives on mortality.

While some studies on death metaphors in Acehnese exist, they are limited in scope and depth, particularly in distinguishing between positive and negative expressions. This study addresses that gap by systematically documenting the metaphors used by Acehnese speakers to describe death, classifying them into positive and negative categories, and analyzing their mappings from source to target domains. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) identify how Acehnese death metaphors reflect cultural beliefs and values, and what distinctions exist between respectful and impolite representations of death, and (2) interpret the contextual meanings of these metaphors in everyday discourse. The research questions for studying death metaphors in Acehnese, based on the metaphors used to describe death and their mapping from source to target domains, are formulated as follows:

1. How do Acehnese death metaphors reflect cultural beliefs and values, and what distinctions can be observed

between positive and negative representations?

2. What are the contextual meanings of Acehnese death metaphors?

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it enriches Conceptual Metaphor Theory by providing data from a local language context that has received little scholarly attention. Culturally, it documents Acehnese ways of framing mortality, offering insights into how Islamic beliefs and local traditions shape metaphorical expressions of death. Practically, this study contributes to preserving Acehnese linguistic heritage and promoting intercultural understanding of how communities conceptualize universal human experiences.

This research employs Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Kövecses, 2010; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) as its methodological framework to elucidate the complexities of metaphors, paving the way for further investigations into metaphorical expressions across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts (Musolff, 2016). By analyzing how death is metaphorically expressed in Acehnese, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the imagery embedded in the language, highlighting the interplay between culture, religion, and metaphor. In doing so, it enhances cultural sensitivity and challenges biased perceptions, underscoring the relevance of metaphor studies for cross-cultural communication and intercultural understanding (Deignan et al., 2013).

Understanding Metaphor

Metaphors are more than stylistic devices of language; they represent fundamental ways in which humans conceptualize the world. As Lakoff and Johnson (2003, P. 4) highlight, metaphors are "pervasive in everyday life," structuring not only communication but also thought and action. This perspective shifts the study of metaphor from the realm of literary ornamentation to cognitive science, emphasizing that metaphors form part of the mental models through which individuals understand reality. Kövecses (2010) further notes that metaphors act as conceptual bridges between abstract and concrete domains, allowing humans to grasp phenomena that might otherwise remain intangible, such as time, morality, or mortality. For instance, expressions like "time is money" or "life is a journey" illustrate how abstract experiences are framed in familiar, concrete terms that shape cultural norms and expectations.

Moreover, metaphors are not universal but deeply embedded in culture, reflecting distinct worldviews and social experiences. Research by Musolff (2016) illustrates that metaphors vary across communities, shaped by historical, social,

and religious contexts. Thus, studying metaphors provides insight into how societies conceptualize central aspects of human experience. This makes metaphor analysis a powerful tool for cross-cultural understanding and linguistic studies. Importantly, metaphors are not static but evolve alongside societal changes, making them a lens for examining shifts in cultural identity and values. For example, metaphors of death in religious communities may highlight peace and transition, while in conflict-ridden societies, they may emphasize struggle, sacrifice, or loss. This dynamic quality reinforces the importance of metaphor studies as both a linguistic and cultural endeavor.

An understanding of death metaphors in Acehnese society significantly enriches both linguistic studies and the revitalisation of local culture (Usman & Yusuf, 2020; Usman & Yusuf, 2022). From a linguistic perspective, examining these metaphors provides insights into the cognitive and communicative strategies used by speakers to articulate complex and often sensitive experiences surrounding death (Gathigia et al., 2018). It illustrates how language encodes values, emotions, and social norms, offering evidence for how metaphors bridge abstract existential concepts with tangible cultural expressions. This contributes to broader linguistic scholarship by documenting unique metaphorical patterns that may differ from or align with those found in other cultural contexts, thereby enhancing comparative studies in conceptual metaphor theory.

From a cultural standpoint, analyzing death metaphors in Aceh supports the preservation and revitalisation of local traditions. Aceh, as a society shaped by Islam and historical experiences of conflict and natural disaster, embeds profound spiritual and communal meanings into its metaphors of death. By documenting and analyzing these expressions, scholars help safeguard intangible cultural heritage that might otherwise fade due to globalization and language shift. Moreover, raising awareness of these metaphors promotes cultural sensitivity and pride among younger generations, reinforcing Acehnese identity and worldview. In this way, linguistic research on death metaphors not only advances theoretical frameworks but also strengthens the continuity and vitality of Acehnese cultural heritage.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Metaphors serve as cognitive tools that allow us to understand abstract or complex concepts by relating them to more concrete ideas. They significantly influence how we think, speak, and perceive the world. Initially developed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), CMT posits that metaphor is not merely a linguistic ornament but a fundamental mechanism of human cognition. At its core, the theory emphasizes the relationship between a source domain (concrete,

familiar concepts) and a target domain (abstract, less familiar concepts), with systematic mappings between the two (Kövecses, 2010). This systematicity allows metaphors to provide coherence and structure to our conceptual system (Banaruee et al., 2019; Gibbs, 2011).

Studying metaphors is crucial due to their far-reaching implications in language, cognition, communication, and culture. They reveal how individuals and communities frame reality, influence discourse, and guide behavior. For example, metaphors are effective pedagogical tools for introducing unfamiliar concepts, aiding retention and recall (Perrez & Reuchamps, 2015). In politics, metaphors such as "nation as family" or "argument as war" shape public debates, while in health communication, metaphors like "battle against cancer" affect patients' understanding and coping strategies (Demjén et al., 2016). In scientific contexts, metaphors foster innovative problem-solving by providing fresh perspectives and facilitating analogical reasoning.

Moreover, CMT suggests that metaphorical thinking is a universal phenomenon of human cognition (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Although metaphors transcend specific dialects or cultures, their linguistic realizations often vary in form. For example, while many cultures share the metaphor time is money, the precise expressions differ depending on linguistic and cultural resources. This illustrates both the universality and the cultural specificity of metaphor (Kövecses, 2010). Recognizing this duality underscores the value of studying metaphors not only for theoretical insights into cognition but also for understanding how cultural contexts shape the way universal conceptual patterns are expressed.

Cultural Beliefs and Linguistic Expression of Death Metaphors

Culture and language are intricately connected. Concepts such as proverbs, conversation norms, power dynamics in language, and metaphors illustrate this relationship (Kövecses, 2010). In Acehnese, metaphors express abstract ideas by linking them to more tangible experiences. For example, the metaphor *babah tarék* [tight mouth] describes someone who enjoys contradicting others, while *céng brat siblah* [a scale heavy on one side] refers to a judge who acts unfairly. These examples demonstrate how cultural values are embedded in metaphorical language. In Acehnese society, respect for elders and the expectation of fairness are key social norms, and the metaphors *babah tarék* ("tight mouth") and *céng brat siblah* ("a scale heavy on one side") symbolically encode these values. In a similar way, metaphors related to death are not merely linguistic devices but reflections of cultural and religious beliefs about mortality, the afterlife, and social attitudes toward loss. Thus, Acehnese death

metaphors illustrate the close interconnection between cultural values and linguistic expressions, showing how language embodies and transmits cultural perspectives on life and death.

Research into death metaphors highlights their widespread existence across various cultures and their significance in dealing with mortality. Scholars have identified several common conceptual metaphors related to death, including 'death is a journey', 'death is the end', 'death is rest', and 'death is a summons' (Gathigia et al., 2018). These metaphors often act as euphemisms, allowing individuals to sidestep a confrontation with death (Gathigia et al., 2018). In therapeutic settings, metaphors can facilitate discussions surrounding death and grief (Spall et al., 2001). Concerns about death may also shape people's preferences for metaphorical descriptions of God, which can reinforce their religious beliefs (Keefer et al., 2021). Furthermore, death metaphors significantly impact fairy tales and myths across cultures, aiding in their interpretation, classification, and transmission (Herrero Ruiz, 2015). Understanding these metaphors emphasized the role of language in shaping cultural concepts of death, offering insights into how linguistic expressions influence perceptions and guide mortality. In cognitive linguistic terms, these expressions can be understood through the process of conceptual mapping, where a familiar source domain (such as a journey, rest, or a summons) is projected onto the target domain of death. In Acehnese mourning language, for instance, the phrase *geuwoe bak Tuhan* ("has gone home to God") draws on the source domain of homecoming to conceptualize death as a return to the Creator. Similarly, *geujak* ("has gone") uses the source domain of physical departure to express the target domain of mortality. These mappings illustrate how Acehnese speakers employ cultural and religiously grounded source domains to make sense of the abstract concept of death in ways that resonate with their worldview.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, which focuses on understanding participants' perspectives through detailed accounts of language and meaning in natural settings (Fossey et al., 2002). The analysis is guided by Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which provides the framework for identifying and interpreting metaphors related to death. The research was conducted in Banda Aceh, the capital city of Aceh Province, located at the northern tip of Sumatra Island, Indonesia, an area well known for its strong Islamic identity, rich cultural traditions, and historical experiences of conflict and disaster. Data were collected through interviews with participants at locations they

selected, ensuring a comfortable and contextually relevant setting.

While the sample size was limited to ten informants, purposive sampling ensured that participants were knowledgeable speakers of Acehnese and capable of providing culturally rich data. In qualitative research, such sampling prioritizes depth of understanding rather than statistical generalizability (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The use of semi-structured interviews combined with Conceptual Metaphor Theory provided a methodologically appropriate framework for analyzing culturally embedded expressions of death. Although the methodology is relatively simple, its strength lies in its ability to reveal nuanced cultural meanings that may not emerge from larger-scale or purely quantitative approaches.

Research Informants

This study employed purposive sampling to select native Acehnese speakers fluent in the language and familiar with cultural practices (Sugiyono, 2013). Ten informants (five males and five females) were chosen from Banda Aceh and surrounding districts, representing diverse ages, professions, education levels, and rural–urban backgrounds. Younger participants reflected contemporary usage, while older ones provided traditional perspectives. The sample size was deemed sufficient for qualitative research focused on depth rather than generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This demographic diversity enriched the analysis by capturing variation in metaphor use across gender, generation, and social roles. A detailed list of participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
List of Informants

No	Informant	Age	Edu. Background	Job	Place of origin	Domicile
1	P 1	47	Unviersity graduate	Housewife	Samalanga, Bireuen District	Lambaro Skep, Banda Aceh
2	P 2	29	Unviersity graduate	Entrepreneur	Banda Aceh	Darussalam, Banda Aceh
3	P 3	50	Unviersity graduate	Teacher	Banda Aceh	Lampulo
4	P 4	49	Unviersity graduate	Farmer	Aceh Besar	Aceh Besar
5	P 5	27	Unviersity graduate	School Operator	Aceh Besar	Aceh Besar
6	P 6	30	Unviersity graduate	Teacher	Sigli, Pidie District	Beurawe, Banda Aceh
7	P 7	49	Unviersity graduate	Teacher	Aneuk Galong, Aceh Besar District	Aneuk Galong, Aceh Besar District
8	P 8	22	University student	Student	Medan	Lam Ara, Aceh Besar
9	P 9	22	University student	Student	Ulee Kareng	Ulee Kareng
10	P 10	21	University student	Student	Darussalam	Darussalam

Techniques of Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed informants to share their perspectives and experiences on metaphors of death in Acehnese. Interviews were conducted at the informants' preferred locations; a strategy intended to create a comfortable environment and elicit more natural responses. Each session lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and focused on eliciting metaphorical expressions related to death, the contexts in which they are used, and their cultural or religious connotations. The researchers designed the interview guide, conducted the interviews, and coded the data. Then they also recorded and transcribed the sessions to ensure accuracy and completeness for subsequent analysis.

Techniques of Data Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and cross-checked with field notes for accuracy (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Metaphorical expressions were then coded, grouped, and classified by linguistic form and meaning. Guided by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2010),

the analysis mapped relationships between source domains (concrete experience) and target domains (death and mortality). This process identified 14 recurring metaphors, categorized into positive and negative representations, and interpreted for their cultural significance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses them in relation to the cultural and linguistic framework of Acehnese society. Based on the analysis of interview data, 14 distinct metaphors of death were identified, expressed through both words and phrases such as *geuwoe bak Tuhan* ("has gone home to God") and *maté* ("is dead"). These metaphors were classified using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2010), which explains how concrete source domains (e.g., journey, departure, summons) are mapped onto the abstract target domain of death. The choice of expressions was often shaped by social and cultural contexts: within families, softer terms were used with children (e.g., *geujak* – "has

gone"), while in religious or communal settings, death was framed as a return to God (*geucok pulang* – "has been taken back to God"), reflecting Acehnese values of piety and acceptance. These findings highlight how language both encodes and transmits cultural beliefs about mortality.

The analysis further showed that of the 17 metaphors, 10 conveyed positive connotations, while 7 reflected negative perceptions. In this study, positive connotations refer to expressions that provide comfort, reflect Islamic beliefs, or soften the impact of loss, such as *geuwoe bak Tuhan* [gone home to God] or *jak beuet* [gone to study the Qur'an]. Negative connotations, by contrast, describe death in blunt, harsh, or socially distancing terms, such as *maté* [is dead] or *wabah kireueh* [scraped by a plague]. The predominance of positive metaphors indicates a cultural and psychological tendency among Acehnese speakers to frame death as a meaningful transition and spiritual journey rather than merely an end.

The predominance of positive metaphors indicates a cultural and psychological tendency among Acehnese speakers to frame death as a meaningful transition and spiritual journey rather than merely an end. This linguistic pattern aligns with the Islamic worldview, which emphasizes returning to the Creator, and underscores the role of metaphor in providing comfort and reinforcing social cohesion in the face of loss (Keefer et al., 2021). These findings directly support the study's purpose by demonstrating how Acehnese death metaphors reflect cultural beliefs and values, particularly the search for meaning and consolation in grief. In contrast, the smaller number of negative metaphors highlights social tensions, where some expressions foreground loss, disruption, or even

disrespectful attitudes toward death. Together, these results show how Acehnese mourning language balances reverence and consolation with the realities of grief and social critique, thereby fulfilling the study's aim of mapping the cultural significance of death metaphors.

This study draws on ten purposively selected Acehnese informants of diverse ages, genders, and professions, including housewives, teachers, farmers, entrepreneurs, students, and civil servants. All were native speakers who actively used Acehnese and engaged in cultural practices such as *peusijuek* (blessing rituals), *meugang* (pre-Ramadan feast), *kenduri*(communal feasts), and death-related traditions. Their varied life experiences, from rural to urban contexts and across generations, provided nuanced perspectives on how death metaphors are expressed and interpreted. All metaphors discussed below are drawn from these interviews and are presented in two categories: nine with positive representations of death and five with negative representations.

In presenting the findings, these sections explore the metaphors Acehnese speakers employ to conceptualize death. The data were obtained from interviews with ten participants (see Table 1). A total of 17 metaphors were identified, consisting of 10 with positive associations and 7 with negative associations. Each metaphor is presented with examples of participants' expressions, followed by interpretation of its cultural meaning. Direct participant quotations are provided in Acehnese with English translations.

Positive Death Metaphors in Acehnese Culture
Ten positive metaphors for death emerged from the participants' accounts (see Table 2).

Table 2
Positive Death Metaphors

No	Metaphors with positive association	Translation	Source
1	*Geutinggai tanyoe*	[Left us]	P1, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
2	*Geuwoe bak Tuhan*	[Gone home to God]	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
3	*Geucok pulang*	[Been taken back (by God)]	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6,P8, P9, P10
4	*Geujak*	[Has departed]	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9
5	*Geupeulikôt dônya*	[Turned back to the world]	P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10
6	*Jak beuet*	[Gone to study (the quran)]	P1, P4, P6, P7
7	*Habéh umu*	[Life has ended]	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
8	*Meuninggai*	[Passed away]	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
9	*Meurumpök malaikat*	[Gone to meet the angel]	P1, P2, P3, P6
10	*Hana lé lam dônya*	[Has disappeared from the world]	P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10

Acehnese speakers frequently use positive metaphors to soften the impact of death, align it with Islamic beliefs, and frame it as a meaningful transition rather than an abrupt end. These metaphors fall into several conceptual domains: death as departure or journey, return to the Creator, absence from the world, expiration of life's allotted time, neutral euphemism, and sacred encounter.

Each reflects cultural values of respect, faith, and social sensitivity, allowing the bereaved to navigate grief in ways that uphold dignity and communal harmony.

Death as Departure and Journey
The metaphors *geutinggai tanyoe* [has left us] and *geujak* [has departed] frame death as a departure,

emphasizing movement away from the world of the living. This euphemistic choice avoids the bluntness of *meuninggai* [died] or *maté*[dead], particularly in the first moments of announcing death. As P6 explained:

> "Ka geu tinggai tanyoe itu biasanya itu sering digunakan untuk mengabarkan awal pertama meninggal … tidak boleh kita gunakan kata meninggal, karena bahasa sederhana itu meninggal … kita bilang nyoe ka hana lé ayah droe, ka geu tinggai tanyoe."
> ["*Ka geu tinggai tanyoe* is usually used to announce death for the first time. We avoid using the word *meninggal* [died], because it is too blunt. Instead, we say *he has left us*."] (P6)

This reflects Acehnese communicative norms where euphemism is used to mitigate shock and preserve respect. P5 highlighted that *geujak* carries similar meaning: "Ka geujak means 'has gone.' Ka geujak and *ka geutinggai tanyoe* are almost the same in meaning" (P5). P9 noted that *geujak* is often used for children: "It seems to be more commonly applied to younger individuals, such as infants or children under seven" (P9).

Together, these metaphors exemplify the domain of death as a journey, evoking imagery of travel rather than finality. Cross-cultural parallels exist, such as the Tibetan view of death as the soul leaving the body for reincarnation (Tsomo, 2006), the Hindu notion of death as the soul's journey toward liberation (Sumantra & Putra, 2023), or the Spanish *se fue*("he/she has gone"). Such expressions demonstrate a universal tendency to soften mortality by framing it as transition rather than termination.

A special child-directed variant of this domain is *jak beuet* [gone to study the Qur'an]. Traditionally, *jak beuet* refers to leaving home to pursue religious study, often for years, with the expectation of returning as a learned person. When used to explain death to children, the metaphor provides comfort by suggesting the deceased has gone away for study, with the implicit hope of reunion. P1 explained:

> "Untuk menutupi bahwa … kita bilang ke anak ini bahwa orang tuanya sudah meninggal, oh berarti mama *ka geu jak beuet*, padahal intinya kan sudah meninggal."
> ["To soften the news for children, instead of saying their parent has died, we say *ka geu jak beuet*—she has gone to study—though in essence it still means death."] (P1)

As P6 added, this expression is reserved for children under ten: "For children, it is considered inappropriate to say *hana lé*[gone]. Instead, we say *ka geu jak beuet*, which is simplified for children" (P6). By transforming death into a purposeful and temporary departure, the metaphor preserves hope, embeds religious meaning, and protects children from the harshness of grief. Comparable euphemisms exist in English ("gone to a better place") and Spanish (*se fue al Cielo*), but *jak beuet* is distinctive in linking death with religious study, reflecting Acehnese values of patience, learning, and faith.

Death as Return to the Creator

Among the most central metaphors are *geuwoe bak Tuhan* [gone home to God] and *geucok pulang* [been taken back by God], both deeply rooted in Acehnese Islamic spirituality. P7 explained the communal function of *geuwoe bak Tuhan*:

> "Di setiap musibah itu kan ada pengumuman di kampung … biasanya orang yang mengumumkan sudah berpulang ke Rahmatullah, *ka geuwoe bak Tuhan*."
> ["In every misfortune, there is usually a village announcement that someone has passed away, expressed as *ka geuwoe bak Tuhan*."] (P7)

P9 emphasized its positive connotation:

> "Artinya sudah pulang ke Allah … berarti orang … sudah meninggal dunia. Jadi konotasi levelnya itu bagus."
> ["It means having returned to Allah … indicating the person has died. The connotation carries a positive value."] (P9)

This metaphor situates death within a theological framework of homecoming, aligning with Qur'anic teachings that life is temporary and ultimate belonging rests with God. It provides spiritual reassurance and communal acceptance, similar to Spanish *ha ido con Dios* and Swahili *amekwenda kwa Mungu* (Tramutoli, 2017). Closely related, *geucok pulang* stresses divine agency. P1 noted its respectful tone:

> "Secara halusnya … *ka geucok pulang lé Allah* … maksud bagus maksud halus juga."
> ["In a refined way, saying *geucok pulang lé Allah* conveys a good and gentle meaning."] (P1)

P6 explained its common use by religious teachers:

> "*Ka geucok pulang* itu sama dengan meninggal … biasanya ulama juga sering pakai … misalnya ada anak kecil yang meninggal … *ka geucok pulang lé Po*."
> ["*Ka geucok pulang* is equivalent to passing away … often used by Islamic teachers, especially when a young child dies."] (P6)

Theologically, *geucok pulang* frames death as God's will rather than human agency, softening loss through humility before divine power. Its resonance across contexts, from elders to infants, reflects a cultural preference for respectful language in matters of mortality. Comparable to the English "gone to meet their maker" (Harris, 2018), the phrase underscores the belief that death is a natural return to the Creator.

Death as Absence or Disappearance

The metaphors *hana lé lam dônya* [has disappeared from the world] and *geupeulikôt dônya* [has turned

his/her back to the world] emphasize separation from worldly life. P10 explained:

> "Maknanya … dia sudah tidak ada lagi eksistensinya bersama kita."
> ["It means the person no longer exists together with us."] (P10)

P1 described *geupeulikôt dônya*:

> "*Ka geupeulikôt dônya* means to turn one's back on the world, but I rarely hear it used." (P1)

These metaphors highlight the absence of the deceased from communal life, focusing on the void they leave behind. While *hana lé lam dônya* conveys disappearance in social terms, *geupeulikôt dônya* suggests detachment from material existence, echoing Islamic teachings on life's impermanence. Their infrequent but significant use parallels metaphors in other cultures, such as "leaving the world behind" in English or *ameondoka* [he/she has left] in Swahili (Tramutoli, 2017). From a sociolinguistic perspective, such euphemisms reflect politeness strategies, aligning with Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory that indirectness mitigates the discomfort of discussing mortality.

Death as the End of Time

The metaphor *habéh umu* [life has ended] was reported by all ten participants, highlighting its pervasiveness. P1 explained simply: "*Abeh umu* means that one's lifespan has ended, indicating that the person has passed away" (P1).

P6 added that it is often used in reference to acquaintances or fellow villagers: "*Abeh umu* … is commonly used and is not considered harsh; rather, it remains polite and appropriate" (P6).

This expression reflects the conceptualization of life as a finite quota of time given by God that eventually runs out. It normalizes death as part of life's natural cycle, much like the Mandarin 寿终正寝 (shòu zhōng zhèng qǐn — "to die a natural death") (Callahan, 2019) or the Portuguese *chegou ao fim da linha* ("reached the end of the line") (Guma, 2023).

Neutral Euphemism

The term *meuninggai* [passed away] was reported by nine participants and represents a culturally neutral expression widely used in Acehnese society. P10 illustrated its typical usage in mosque announcements:

> "'Mak bunoe ibuk yang di ujong nyan diumumkan kah meuninggai bak mesjid bunoe.'"
> ["Earlier the lady who lived at the end of the street was announced as *meuninggai* in the mosque."] (P10)

Unlike harsher terms such as *maté* [dead], *meuninggai* maintains dignity and respect while avoiding elaborate metaphor. Its neutrality makes it acceptable across social contexts, similar to Indonesian *meninggal dunia*. Comparable terms exist in other languages, such as the Irish *ar shlí na fírinne* [on the path of truth] (Kearney, 2006) and the Persian *jân be jân âfarin taslim kardan* [to surrender the soul to the Creator] (Joubert, 2012), each balancing respect with clarity.

Religious Encounter

The metaphor *meurumpök malaikat* [gone to meet the angel] was reported by four participants (P1, P2, P3, P6). P6 described its colloquial function as a cautionary phrase:

> "*Bek sampek meurumpök malaikat maôt nyan.*"
> ["Don't end up meeting the angel of death."] (P6)

P1, however, emphasized its solemn religious meaning:

> "*Ka meureumpök dengan malaikat hana lee geuazeueb …*"
> ["It means the person has passed away, has met the angel, no longer punished as we are in this world."] (P1)

This metaphor highlights death as a sacred encounter with Izrail, the angel of death in Islamic belief (Prochwicz-Studnicka, 2020). Its dual function—as a solemn acknowledgment and as an everyday warning—demonstrates Acehnese linguistic flexibility in embedding theological concepts within both ritual and ordinary speech.

Taken together, these ten positive metaphors illustrate a coherent worldview in which death is framed as part of a larger cycle of existence rather than a rupture. They cluster around three main conceptual domains: journey/departure (*geutinggai tanyoe, geujak, jak beuet*), return to the Creator (*geuwoe bak Tuhan, geucok pulang*), and separation or absence (*hana lé lam dônya, geupeulikôt dônya*). Additional perspectives include expiration of life's time (*habéh umu*), neutral euphemism (*meuninggai*), and sacred encounter (*meurumpök malaikat*). Collectively, they embody Acehnese cultural values of empathy, politeness, and Islamic faith, softening grief while reinforcing communal cohesion and spiritual resilience. The prevalence of journey and departure metaphors resonates with findings in Acehnese proverbs, which similarly employ plant, animal, and spatial imagery to capture life transitions (Iskandar et al., 2025).

Yet, alongside these positive metaphors, Acehnese discourse also employs negative metaphors that are more blunt, harsh, or socially distancing. The following section turns to these negative metaphors, examining how they contrast with the more compassionate linguistic practices discussed above.

Negative Death Metaphors

In contrast to the positive and spiritually consoling metaphors, participants also identified several negative metaphors for death (see Table 3).

Expressions like *maté* [is dead] and *keumah* [is done/finished] stress life's finality, while *wabah kireueh* [scraped by a plague] and *wabah sampôh* [swept by a plague] evoke catastrophic imagery. Terms such as *jom* and *sulu* emphasize the body's lifeless state, and *wakfu'anna* [forgiven], though

softened by its religious origin, still reflects human frailty. Together, these metaphors reveal how Acehnese speakers also frame death in blunt or harsh terms, often without the consoling imagery of journey, separation, or return to the Creator.

Table 3
Negative Metaphors

No	Metaphors with negative association	Translation	Source
1	*Maté*	[Is dead]	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
2	*Keumah*	[Is done/finished]	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10
3	*Wabah kireueh*	[Scraped by a plague]	P1, P2, P3, P6, P7
4	*Wabah sampôh*	[Swept by a plague]	P1, P2, P3, P6, P7
5	*Jom*	[Flat, straight]	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7
6	*Sulu*	[Straight, flat]	P1
7	*Wakfu'anna*	[Forgiven (softening negative connotation)]	P1, P2, P4, P6

Maté [Is dead]

The metaphor maté, reported by all participants (P1–P10), is one of the most direct and blunt ways of referring to death in Acehnese. As P10 explained, *"maté ya mati maksudnya ya kayak tadi kematian mati cuman pemakaiannya aja jangan ke manusia kayak gitu"* ["Maté simply means 'dead,' referring to death as mentioned earlier, but its usage should not be directed toward human beings"] (P10). Similarly, P6 clarified its restricted use: *"Kalau orang biasa… misalnya ada orang melakukan kejahatan, tiba-tiba tembak polisi, eh ka maté perampok jeh, atau sudah mati…. tapi kalau untuk kita orang yang kita kenal pasti kita bilang sudah meninggal."* ["For ordinary people… when someone commits a crime and is suddenly shot, one might say '*eh ka maté perampok jeh*' or simply 'already dead.' But when referring to people we know, we would certainly say "has passed away"] (P6).

Thus, maté is socially marked: while linguistically simple, its application to humans is discouraged as harsh or disrespectful, reserved instead for animals, plants, or stigmatized individuals (e.g., criminals). Beyond the biological sense, it extends metaphorically to connote moral or social decline, reflecting how Acehnese speakers intertwine mortality with social judgment (Usman & Yusuf, 2022). This illustrates how metaphor choice in Acehnese is deeply tied to social hierarchy and the need to balance clarity with respect.

Keumah [Is done/finished]

The metaphor keumah, also reported by all participants, carries layered meanings ranging from "finished/done" in daily contexts to a harsher connotation of death. P1 observed: *"Misalnya omong keumah… mungkin sebagian orang itu sentimen sama orang yang meninggal itu, ka keumah, ka maté… keumah itu bukan khusus diungkapkan untuk orang meninggal"* ["The expression keumah is also used by some people,

perhaps with certain sentiments, saying ka keumah or ka maté. However, keumah is not exclusively used to refer to death"] (P1). P6 added that keumah often serves as reprimand: *"keumah itu… konteknya musibah…. sudah dilarang, jangan balap-balap kereta…. kejadian lah dia ketabrak. Makanya masih hidup dia, dibilang keumah kah, untung hana maté"* ["Keumah… can be used in the context of a misfortune… when someone ignores warnings and crashes in an accident. Even if they survive, people might say '*Keumah kah* 'Damn you', *untong hana maté* 'you could have been killed,' as a warning"] (P6).

In contrast, P7 emphasized its directness: *"Keumah… kalau biasa harian berarti kan sudah siap. Tapi kalau kami, kalau keumah itu sudah mampus lah istilahnya"* ["Keumah in daily use can mean 'finished,' but for us, in death contexts, it means 'has dropped dead'"] (P7).

Overall, keumah operates as a dysphemistic metaphor, blending literal finality with social judgment. Its harsher tone makes it unsuitable in respectful mourning, but it appears in references to sudden misfortune, reckless behavior, or socially distant individuals. *Keumah* therefore exemplifies how Acehnese uses blunt death metaphors to reinforce social distance and regulate behavior.

Plague Imagery: Wabah kireueh [Scraped by a plague] and Wabah sampôh [Swept by a plague]

A cluster of metaphors (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7) employs plague and epidemic imagery—*wabah kireueh* [scraped by a plague] and *wabah sampôh* [swept by a plague]. Both function less as neutral references to death and more as verbal curses. P7 noted their rarity: *"beu wabah sampoh, beu wabah kireuh… hampir sama juga dengan kata ini, mampus tadilah"* ["They are almost the same as the word *mampus* (drop dead)"] (P7). P6 emphasized their curse-like force: *"beu wabah kireueh… maksudnya seseorang itu yang memang dia jahat sekali… Hilang semua, keturunan-keturunannya hilang"* ["It

is addressed to someone truly evil, implying that even their lineage should disappear"] (P6). Similarly, P1 explained that *wabah sampôh* expresses the wish that "no trace remains" of the person.

These metaphors illustrate how Acehnese speakers sometimes mobilize disease imagery to express moral outrage and social exclusion. By likening disruptive individuals to plagues, the metaphors signal the desire to eradicate negative influence and restore harmony. Comparable plague metaphors in other cultures also encode moral corruption and collective punishment (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). In Acehnese, however, their rarity today suggests cultural movement toward softer expressions, reflecting changing sensitivities about respectful mourning.

Bodily Imagery: Jom and Sulu [Flat, straight]
Another strand of negative metaphors draws from bodily imagery. *Jom* [flat, straight], reported by P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, depicts death as physical collapse and immobility. P1 described it as *"kasar"* [harsh], while P6 explained it connotes being "leveled" or erased. Similarly, *sulu* [straight, flat], reported only by P1, was glossed as *"ka sulu tu dah lemah, udah lemas, udah lembek"* ["Sulu means already weak, feeble, limp"] (P1).

Both metaphors strip death of spiritual transcendence, reducing it to corporeal stillness. As Tian (2014) notes, such metaphors map the physical image of the lifeless body onto the abstract concept of death, yielding blunt, dysphemistic expressions. In Acehnese discourse, *jom* and *sulu* are rarely used in formal mourning, instead surfacing in colloquial or condemnatory contexts. Their harshness aligns them with other dysphemisms like *keumah*, highlighting how negative metaphors foreground physicality and finality.

Wakfu'anna [Forgiven]
Reported by P1, P2, P4, and P6, *wakfu'anna* originates from the Arabic Qur'anic supplication *wa'fu 'anna* [and forgive us], but in Acehnese it has been recontextualized as a metaphor for death, often used humorously or softly. P6 explained: *"itu pelesetan dari bahasa Arab… biasanya sering digunakan oleh teungku-teungku penceramah… cuman dalam konteks candaan"* ["It is a distortion of Arabic, often used by religious teachers, but in humorous contexts"] (P6).

Unlike maté or keumah, wakfu'anna often references death through religious association and humor, blurring the line between sacred and colloquial language. This aligns with Gholami et al. (2016) observation that Arabic expressions in Muslim societies are frequently metaphorically extended in vernacular use to soften the expression of taboo subjects. In this light, wakfu'anna illustrates how Acehnese speakers adapt liturgical or

Qur'anic language into everyday discourse, transforming solemn religious phrases into culturally meaningful metaphors that mitigate the emotional and social harshness of speaking about death.

The negative metaphors of death in Acehnese—*maté*, *keumah*, plague-based curses (*wabah kireueh/sampôh*), bodily imagery (*jom, sulu*), and softened Arabic distortion (*wakfu'anna*)—stand in sharp contrast to the positive metaphors of journey, separation, and return to the Creator. While the latter offer consolation and spiritual reassurance, the former emphasize bluntness, finality, or social sanction. Negative metaphors function less as tools of comfort and more as mechanisms of exclusion, judgment, or humor, situating death within the corporeal and social rather than the transcendental. This duality reflects the richness of Acehnese linguistic practices, where mortality is not only a spiritual transition but also a socially negotiated phenomenon, mediated through language that can either console or condemn.

CONCLUSION
This study has shown that death metaphors in Acehnese discourse are deeply embedded in cultural, religious, and social values. The analysis revealed fourteen distinct metaphors, with nine carrying positive connotations and five associated with negative meanings. Positive metaphors, such as *geutinggai tanyoe* [has left us], *geuwoe bak Tuhan* [gone home to God], and *jak beuet* [gone to study (the Qur'an)], frame death as a journey, a return to the Creator, or a gentle departure that softens grief, particularly for children. These expressions not only embody Islamic teachings and Acehnese traditions but also highlight the community's preference for euphemism and politeness in navigating sensitive experiences of loss. By emphasizing continuity, transformation, and spiritual reassurance, the positive metaphors serve to console the bereaved, maintain social harmony, and reinforce shared cultural identity (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Kövecses, 2010).

By contrast, the negative metaphors—*maté*, *keumah*, *jom*, *sulu*, *wabah kireueh*, *wabah sampôh*, and *wakfu'anna*—foreground the harsher and more socially distancing aspects of death. They draw from conceptual domains of bodily collapse, plague or calamity, and even religious humor, stripping death of transcendence and instead using it as a vehicle for moral judgment, condemnation, or blunt description. While these negative expressions are less common in respectful mourning contexts, their presence in everyday discourse illustrates how Acehnese speakers use metaphor to regulate social norms, express frustration, or manage taboo topics with humor or dysphemism. Such findings resonate with

broader studies of euphemism and dysphemism in death discourse, where language serves both as a shield and as a weapon in negotiating mortality (Allan & Burridge, 1991; Demjén et al., 2016). Taken together, the Acehnese case highlights how metaphors of death operate not only as linguistic reflections of grief and faith but also as instruments of social negotiation, balancing consolation with critique, transcendence with corporeality, and respect with exclusion.

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