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## Attitudes of Acehnese People towards Acehnese Proverbs in Relation to Education

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### Abstract

*This study is aimed at describing proverbs from the Acehnese society and explaining the attitudes of people towards those proverbs in relation to education. The methodology applied was ethnographic using a questionnaire to obtain data. A number of 14 respondents who varied across ages, educational background and occupations participated in this study. These respondents included three housewives, two university students, one fresh graduate, one junior high school and two senior high school students, one trader, two senior citizens, one teacher and one civil servant. Based on the findings, the attitude nowadays of the Acehnese has changed radically. Out of eight adults, only three were actively using proverbs in their daily lives and teaching their children those proverbs. All of the young people, who ranged from fourteen to twenty three years old, did not use proverbs. In relation to education, proverbs are used to teach the society about courtesy, advices (e.g. for choosing companions and friends in life, child rearing, socializing/conversing, and not to mind other people's business), and shyness as part of faith. Furthermore, a significant language shift has occurred in Aceh which has impacted Acehnese oral literature whereby more parents today prefer Indonesian to be taught as their children's first language (Alamsyah, et al., 2011). Consequently this has put the Acehnese proverbs under the threat of becoming extinct in their own society.*

**Keywords:** Acehnese proverbs, oral literature, moral education.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Proverbs are cultural creations of language, often referred to as “wise words” or “old sayings”. They are called wise words simply because they carry wisdom and are

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usually used by wise members of the society in their formal speech. They are called old sayings since they are often heard from the mouths of the elders and because they have usually existed for as long as the people of a society can remember. Unlike books, paintings, poems and many other intellectual and artistic creations, proverbs do not carry any intellectual or artistic property rights. It is difficult to prove who initially created them or when a particular proverb was created. It can be said that proverbs belong to the people who own the language and its culture

Proverbs are found in every language as a different way of saying something with certain implicit meanings. People use proverbs to express ideas, opinions and emotions that they have toward their culture, their society and their surroundings. In most traditional societies, proverbs are one of the elements that shape the culture and history that have mostly been transferred orally from generation to generation (Omolewa, 2007, p. 294). By tradition, people use proverbs as a way to express their opinions politely in order to maintain good social relationships. Strong advice which is given through a proverb may not hurt someone's feelings because it is given indirectly to that person.

Norms and values which exist in a society contain rules that guide and control its members' attitude as well as moral teachings about what is considered proper or improper. Proverbs in a society serve this role. They deliver more messages than the common language does. Thus, someone does not have to speak a thousand words when the message is conveyed by a proverb. Related to this, Mieder (1993) points out that proverbs are effective tools of expression for any purposes which contain wisdom, knowledge and truth. Although proverbs come in metaphoric language, the message is functional for people to retrieve. In addition, Omalewa (2007, p. 599) explains that the values in proverbs are prognostic as they can be references that criticize, warn, admonish and teach people. In other words, proverbs are known for their practicality and accessibility; it is easier for people to understand and remember cultural values. Proverbs are accessible for people to consult since they are transferred from generation to generation which has been proven to be one of the most effective tools for preserving culture.

As different societies construct different cultures, the Acehnese society has their own way to express their ideas in their culture through proverbs. They use proverbs as a spiritual reflection which indicates the uniqueness of the culture they have. The wise sayings in the form of oral literature are called *Hadih Maja*. However, the word *Hadih* is less appropriate to use as it refers to *Hadith*; the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH – peace be upon him) sayings that is the second reference for Muslims after the holy Al Qur'an. Initially, the term *Hadih Maja* was first mentioned by C.S Hurgonje in his book *De Atjehers* in (Hasyim, et al., 1977, p. x). In the preface of the revised version of *Kumpulan Hadih Maja*, the term *hadih* was changed into *narit* that means "sayings" (Hasyim, et al., 1977). Here are some examples of the Acehnese proverbs (Nasir, 2003) (the Acehnese orthography in this article follows those proposed by Pillai and Yusuf, 2012, p. 1046).

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|--|----------------------------------|
| (1) <i>Awai buet dudoe pikée</i>         | (Act first, think later)         |
| <i>teulah 'oh akhée keu peu lom guna</i> | (regret at the end is of no use) |

Meaning: "Acting without thinking causes disappointment in the end".

- |                                  |                                    |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (2) <i>Buet gob bèk ta-rindu</i> | (Do not long for what others have) |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|

*meukumat iku han ék ta-hila* (when the tail is stuck, it does not wave)

Meaning: “Do not interfere in other people’s affairs”.

(3) *Sulét meupalét* (Lying will encircle)  
*teupat seulammat* (to be straight is safer)

Meaning: “Lies complicate life, honesty is better”.

These examples show that the Acehnese tend to speak their ideas into rhyming words which have hidden meanings and their ideas are generally expressed in symbols and satires. As a kind of oral literature that shapes part of the Acehnese traditions, proverbs should be maintained and developed.

Based on the explanations above, the two research questions that were formulated for this study are as follows:

1. What are the Acehnese people’s attitudes towards Acehnese proverbs?
2. What are the Acehnese proverbs related to moral education?

Therefore, this study is aimed at finding out (1) the Acehnese people’s attitudes towards Acehnese proverbs and (2) the Acehnese proverbs that are related to moral education.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Defining a Proverb

Mieder (2004), a parameologist or scholar of proverbs, defined a proverb as “ a short, generally (well) known sentence remembered by the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation”. He further explained that “semantically, a proverb is defined as any language creation which is short in form but broad in meaning and is done to make people remember the words easily (Mieder, 2004, p. 1). Samovar, et al. (2009, p. 29) also stated “in nearly every culture, proverbs – (that are) communicated in colourful, vivid language and with very few words – offer an important set of values and beliefs for members of the culture. They also reflect the wisdom, biases, and even superstitions of a culture”. It is often suggested in many cultures that a proverb is a means of communication with a double code, which means on one side it contains a message but on the other side it is an expression of art. Acehnese proverbs on the surface are similar to all the definitions mentioned above, however they are even more unique, since besides the forms which vary greatly, most of the Acehnese proverbs are delivered with metaphorical language. They have figurative and literal meanings, but sometimes there is no metaphorical meaning in the Acehnese proverbs.

Acehnese society uses proverbs on any occasion where they are desirable and contextually appropriate to be used. There are some cultural events that often use proverbs in Acehnese traditions such as in a proposal of marriage, in wedding ceremonies, in funeral ceremonies, at family gatherings and on special social occasions. Although there are no proverbs specifically used by certain occupations, there are

proverbs handed down for farmers, fishermen, merchants, and other professions. One example is *tulak tông, tinggai tèm* (push the box, the tin remains), a saying that means there is neither profit nor loss made in trading.

## 2.2 The Form and Structure of Acehese Proverbs

Hasyim, et al. (1969) collected most of the Acehese proverbs as a way to preserve Acehese traditions. However proverbs categorization was not done nor was the meaning of each proverb given at that time. Several years later, a more comprehensive work on the Acehese proverbs was done to complete the earlier book by Hasyim, et al. (1969) when a team translated the literal and metaphoric meanings of the Acehese proverbs into Indonesian (Hasyim, et al., 1977). Some other literatures on Acehese culture and oral traditions have also mentioned proverbs in their discussions, such as Athailah (1986), Hasyimy (1999) and Soelaiman (1979). After more than two decades, the latest publication on *Hadih Maja* or the Acehese proverbs was done by Norman (2011). Although he classified the proverbs based on the number of lines; the literal and deep meanings of the proverbs were not explored.

Acehese proverbs have some elements that are quite distinctive. Acehese proverbs are not only constructed using a single line as most proverbs are, but are also built up in two, three or four lines (Norman, 2011). Nasir (2003) further categorized the proverbs based on the number of lines and rhymes. Each proverb has a different rhyme. The rhyme can be initial rhyme, internal rhyme and/or end rhyme. The proverbs also use alliteration and reiteration or repetition in lines and between lines.

### a. Two-lined proverbs

A two-lined proverb with initial rhyme, alliteration and reiteration in the lines:

- (4) *Hana guna u, na guna teubèe* (No use for coconuts when there is sugar cane)  
*hana guna jinoe, na guna dilée* (no use of now, but was yesterday)

Meaning: “One should not forget the merit of something in the past”.

A two-lined proverb with both internal and end rhyme:

- (5) *Lagèe alèe top beulacan* (Like a naked shrimp in a pond)  
*nyang malèe ureueng jak sajan* (the people walking by are embarrassed)

Meaning: “A saying referring to a shameless person”.

A two-lined proverb with initial alliteration and end rhyme:

- (6) *Gob pajôh boh panah* (Someone else ate the jackfruit)  
*geu-tanyoe meuligan geutah* (we are the ones stuck on the sap)

Meaning: “Criticism of punishment for something which is not one’s fault”.

b. *Three-lined proverbs*

A three-lined proverb with initial rhyme and alliteration, repetition plus partial end rhyme where the non-end rhyme emphasizes the difference with the earlier end rhyme:

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| (7) <i>Matée gajah, tinggai gadéng</i> | (The elephant dies, the ivory remains) |
| <i>matée rimueng, tinggai kuréng</i>   | (the tiger dies, the stripes remain)   |
| <i>matée ureueng, tinggai nan</i>      | (a person dies, only the name remains) |

Meaning: "People remain in the memory of others based on the image they created in life".

A three-lined proverb with internal rhyme and repetition plus alliteration between lines:

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|--|--|
| (8) <i>Ta-moe bak nyang tém peuiem</i> | (Cry with those who can soothe)        |
| <i>ta-khémm bak nyang tém peukra</i>   | (laugh with those who are mirthful)    |
| <i>ta-bang bak nyang na meuiman</i>    | (call to prayer with those with faith) |

Meaning: "Give advice to those who want to listen".

A three-lined proverb with end rhyme, internal alliteration and first and last alliteration:

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|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| (9) <i>Rhueng meusituek ibôh</i> | (Back like a palm branch)        |
| <i>bahô meugulam tanggôh</i>     | (shoulder like a strong carrier) |
| <i>rupa meuengkong rugôh</i>     | (face like a big ugly monkey)    |

Meaning: "Making fun of an ugly person".

c. *Four-lined proverbs*

A four-lined proverb with initial rhyme and alternating initial alliteration/repetition plus alternating end rhyme that fits with the wisdom expressed:

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|--------------------------------------|--|
| (10) <i>Mangat-mangat gulèe labu</i> | (No matter how delicious the pumpkin   |
| <i>na sigiteu leupah sira</i>        | curry is)                              |
| <i>mangat-mangat ureueng meumadu</i> | (there is always a bit too much salt)  |
| <i>na sigiteu leupah haba</i>        | (no matter how happy the man with more |
|                                      | wives)                                 |
|                                      | (there are always too many words)      |

Meaning: "Men with many wives bring trouble into their lives".

A four-lined proverb with internal rhyme/repetition and partial end rhyme:

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|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (11) <i>Campli tan lée keueung</i> | (Chili is spicy no more) |
| <i>sira tan lée masén</i>          | (salt is salty no more)  |

<i>bungong tan lée mubèe</i>	(flowers are fragrant no more)
<i>aneuk dara tan lée malèe</i>	(girls have shame no more)

Meaning: “Values in the society are changing whereby girls are no longer shy to show their feelings to boys”.

A four-lined proverb with end rhyme and partial alliteration corresponding to similar advice (*bak* and *bèk*):

(12) <i>Ta-harap keu aneuk buta siblah</i>	(Relying on children will be blinded one eye)
<i>ta-harap keu gob buta dua blah</i>	(relying on others will be blinded both eyes)
<i>ta-pubuet kedroe barô sah</i>	(to do it ourselves is the best)
<i>ta-jak keudroe barô bagah</i>	(to seek it by ourselves is the most efficient)

Meaning: “Things are not perfectly done if not by professionals and relying on oneself is the best of all”.

### 2.3 The Preservation of Proverbs

According to Brunvand (1968), proverbs should be unique in order to sustain oral traditions and they should also have some distinctive features. Concerning the preservation of tradition in society, Sydow (1965) identified two groups of people who carry on tradition:

1. Passive bearers: folklore bearers who only know the lore but cannot or are not interested in transferring it actively to other people.
2. Active bearers: folklore bearers who know the lore and can transfer it actively and completely to other people.

Active bearers will always be a minority in a society since there are few people who have memorized the lore as it is actively used. This minority are mostly elders and it is very important to save all and any proverbs to avoid them being lost as these people are getting older and will eventually die one day. The number of passive bearers is increasing as more and more Acehnese parents cannot pass on these traditions either because they have little knowledge of the proverbs or because they use Indonesian as their mother tongue with their children. According to Alamsyah, et al. (2011, p. 39) there are some reasons that underlie the trend why Indonesian is becoming more preferable compared to Acehnese in Aceh. The reasons are to ease their children to socialize, therefore Indonesian is now more dominant. Besides more pressure is constructed from the society on its use, it is also easier to communicate. Indonesian is considered more sophisticated and more prestigious, and using it neutralizes dialectical and language differences within Aceh. The phenomenon of preferring another language than the original mother tongue is called language shift and it has become the most common cause of language death. Fishman (1991) as cited by Nelson (2007, p. 201) explains the process as follows.

A typical case of language shift can happen over three generations. First, generations of speakers of language X, the grandparents do not pass their language on

to their children and encourage their children to speak another language, Y. The next generation, the parents, grow up with only a passive knowledge of X but as fluent speakers of Y. The household is bilingual in both languages. Their children grow up as full speakers of Y, only knowing a few words of X at the most and perhaps wishing they knew more of their ancestral language. If this process of shift happens in most of the families in a community, a language can die out in only three generations (Fishman, 1991, as cited in Nelson, 2007, p. 201)

When the parents choose not to pass on their mother tongue to their children as their own preference, it is called language suicide rather than language murder. Nelson (2007, p. 201) mentioned that language suicide happens since there is an internal pressure from the society as they see that the new shifting language is more beneficial economically and prestigiously.

Consequently, oral traditions such as proverbs are under the same threat: As the nature of the proverb is transferred orally; most proverbs in Acehnese are unwritten and remain in the memory of the people. Yusuf (2000) pointed out that:

Acehnese society can be considered as a cultural group that does not preserve their culture physically, and in transcript form. Most of the literary works are transferred orally/verbally from one generation to the next. (Yusuf, 2000, p. 13)

As older people die and the younger generation does not inherit the Acehnese proverbs, it is not impossible that these traditions will die out as well. In line with this, Harun (2003) as quoted by Alamsyah, et al. (2011, p. 33) stated that the condition in which Acehnese people are reluctant to use their mother tongue can make the mother tongue “sick” and it will eventually “die”.

Based on the situation that Acehnese oral tradition bears, I have been inspired and feel the need to conduct an ethnographic study of Acehnese proverbs as I am part of this society. I am one of those few who want to see the proverbs alive and sustained for they help shape the identity of the Acehnese people. I believe that losing one part of a culture means that the people lose a part of who they are.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research is ethnographic in nature since it deals with people’s behavior, their culture and every component of the culture. The particular group observed in this research is the group of language users who use or are exposed to proverbs in their daily communications. Daud (2000, p. 92) stated “by applying ethnography, the researcher is required not only to observe and record phenomena in the behavior of the people in the research setting but also to interpret the behavior of the observed society from their native cultural point of view.” As the nature of quantitative research in social studies is to understand the complexity of an occurrence by exposing and blending oneself into it, I surely have full access to my object of study since I am an Acehnese who understands well how things work in my society.

The aim of this research is to know people’s attitudes towards the Acehnese proverbs to determine the role of the Acehnese proverbs in Acehnese society as well as to gather proverbs especially those relevant to education .

Questionnaires were used as the sole instrument for collecting data. It was chosen as the most convenient technique due to time constraints. Also, the participants were chosen based on their availability and geographical accessibility. There were ten questions related to the participants' background knowledge of the Acehese proverbs, their frequency of using them, the people who originally communicated the proverbs to them and the importance of using and transferring this oral tradition. At the end of the questionnaire, the respondents were to write down proverbs related to education that they knew. There were 14 respondents who participated in the survey and six (6) proverbs were collected which are related to moral education. The categorization of the respondents varied across age groups, educational backgrounds and occupations as they were considered relevant for the need of the study. The participants were, however, selected randomly. There were three housewives, two university students, one fresh graduate, one junior high school student and two senior high school students, one trader, two senior citizens, one teacher and one civil servant.

## **4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 The Attitude of Acehese People towards Acehese Proverbs**

To avoid misleading interpretations of data, the interpretations are not done by percentages. Instead, the results are described qualitatively and quantitatively since the number of respondents is relatively small. The following is a description of each of the questionnaire items.

- The first question was about general knowledge of the proverbs. Three respondents strongly agreed that they know and understand the proverbs well, two agreed, three were ambivalent, two did not know much, and four said they knew nothing at all.
- The second question was about the frequency of using Acehese proverbs. Three respondents strongly agreed that they often used Acehese proverbs, three others agreed, one was ambivalent, two disagreed and five strongly disagreed.
- The third question was a statement that the participant learnt Acehese proverbs from their family and their relatives. Two respondents strongly agreed, five agreed, two disagreed, and five respondents strongly disagreed.
- The fourth statement was about the frequency of people using Acehese proverbs in daily conversation. Four respondents agreed with the statement, four were ambivalent, one disagreed and five strongly disagreed.
- The fifth question was on preference for using proverbs as an indirect way of saying something. Again, four respondents strongly agreed on this, three agreed, one was ambivalent, two disagreed and four strongly disagreed.
- The sixth question was about using proverbs for certain purposes such as to give a warning or to express anger. There were two respondents who strongly agreed, three agreed, five were ambivalent and four disagreed.
- The seventh question, which was about using Acehese proverbs whenever the situation suited a proverb, had three participants strongly agree, three agree, three disagree, and five strongly disagree.
- The eighth question was about the importance of learning and using Acehese proverbs, six participants strongly agreed, three agreed, two were ambivalent, and three disagreed.



- The ninth question was on the religious and moral teachings that are contained in the proverbs. Eight people strongly agreed, four agreed, and two were ambivalent.
- The tenth and last question was about the knowledge that people had about proverbs related to education, two persons strongly agreed, three agreed, four were ambivalent and five strongly disagreed.

The respondents were also asked to write down the proverbs that they knew that were related to education. Only three respondents were able to write down five to seven proverbs, four respondents were able to recall three proverbs, and the other respondents were not able to recall any proverbs related to education.

Proverbs have existed in Acehese society for a long time – as far back as people can recall their memories. The Acehese people have a high sense of art, they talk in poetic language as they do in their common language. In the previous Acehese societies, proverbs were known to be well preserved and all members of the society understood where and when to use them appropriately. They also knew the deep meaning of the proverbs and communicated them well. In the past, one who had mastered many proverbs had prestige in the society as the proverbs contained the wisdom of the society in words. Consequently a person who used them was considered a wise person and people would refer to him for guidance and advice concerning any problems that they faced day-to-day.

Through proverbs, people learnt values, etiquette, prohibitions and other aspects of life that people must know as part of their social identity. Proverbs taught people how to make a living, how to have good social relationships, how to be obedient followers of Islam and other lessons to help make everyone live in harmony. In line with this, Mieder (2004, p. 146) points out that since proverbs belong to the common knowledge of the people, they are very effective devices to communicate wisdom and knowledge about human nature and the world at large. Dabaghi, Pishbin and Niknasab (2010, pp. 813-814) also acknowledged the efficacy of proverbs as the most powerful and effective instruments to transmit culture, social morality, etiquettes, and ideas of the people from one generation to the next as proverbs are excerpts of experiences that reflect social values and the sensibilities of the people.

In contemporary Aceh, the attitude of people towards proverbs has greatly changed. This has happened because the generation who owns the oral traditions such as proverbs does not use them as their ancestors did in day-to-day communication. Most common, only people who speak Acehese as their mother tongue now actively use the Acehese proverbs. As stated by Hakim (2013, pp. 16-17) proverbs in Acehese society are used as *bumbu penyedap* or “ingredients” in most formal speeches from the head of a village to top government officials. Instead of the frequency of use of the Acehese proverbs, more and more people these days consider using proverbs as out of date and view straightforward speech as more preferable. These phenomena occur as a result of the influence of modern life. Sastrowardoyo, Damono and Ahmad (1985, p. 3) describes the condition of Acehese oral traditions as stagnant and says that they no longer occupy the central role they once did in the lives of the Acehese. The questionnaire results showed that the active users of the Acehese proverbs are mostly the middle aged and elderly people.

Despite the recent condition of proverbs, traditional society like Acehese still uses proverbs as a medium to transfer norms, rules, and values. Proverbs still play a role as repositories to record every important message which should be followed by the society. Besides the role of recording every aspect of culture carried on by the

Acehese proverbs, they also function to educate people to behave properly. Therefore, proverbs have been used and should still be used as an educational tool containing wisdom for children to learn in order to model their behavior.

## 4.2 Acehese Proverbs Related to Moral Education

Since Acehese proverbs were created and repeated orally by people with various backgrounds, there are a number of proverbs with similar themes. The following are some Acehese proverbs grouped under some themes for the teaching of morals in education.

### 4.2.1 Teaching Courtesy

Among the themes for the teaching of morals in education, proverbs are used to teach courtesy to the society. An example of a related proverb is as shown below, which uses internal alliteration/repetition and some end rhyming:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (13) <i>Beunci bèk ta-peuleumah kulét</i> | (If you hate something don't show it)     |
| <i>peunyakét bèk ta-peuleumah nyata</i>   | (if you are ill, don't let anyone see it) |
| <i>ka sakét bah di dalam</i>              | (if it is painful inside)                 |
| <i>bèk hiram bak ie muka</i>              | (don't let it show on your face)          |

As discussed earlier, Acehese proverbs are mostly metaphoric. In this four-lined proverb, the first two lines are metaphoric and the last two lines contain the message. Literally, the first line words *ta-peuleumah kulét* mean to show the skin or a more comprehensible meaning is to make something appear. This proverb advises not to show anger or hatred to others no matter how painful we feel because of unfairness or a negative attitude. To not show anger is typical for Eastern people and it is considered rude to be frontally angry at others since courtesy is a fixed wisdom to be learnt and accepted as a way of life in society.

Acehese proverbs are also poetic note in both the proverb above and the proverb below, the internal rhythm and link using *bèk*, *bak* and *bah* also the rhyming at the ends of the second and fourth lines corresponding to the ends of the two sections of the proverb, the metaphoric and the practical.

A similar proverb is:

- |                             |                               |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (14) <i>Uleue beu matée</i> | (The snake should die)        |
| <i>ranténg bèk patah</i>    | (the branch should not break) |
| <i>buét beu jeuét</i>       | (work should be successful)   |
| <i>geutanyoe bek leumah</i> | (one should not be seen)      |

In seeking the solution to a problem, or to reconcile and or decide a legal case, one has to be wise. The metaphor *uleue* (snake) refers to a trouble or a problem. The word *leumah* means to show or to be seen. This proverb is similar to the first one as advising that to appear or to show off is something that everyone should avoid doing. It is obvious that such proverbs were spread in the society to teach moral values such as to be courteous and humble.

#### 4.2.2 Advice for Choosing Companions and Friends in Life

Another theme is advice for choosing companions and friends for life. An example of this proverb is as illustrated below:

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|---|--|
| (15) <i>Bungong rom bungong riham</i><br><i>bungong peukan nyang mangat bèe</i><br><i>ta-meukawén nyan sipadan</i><br><br><i>ta-meurakan nyang toe meunalèe</i> | <i>(Rom flower, Riham flower)</i><br><i>(the market flower is the most fragrant)</i><br><i>(we should marry the one matched to us)</i><br><br><i>(we should make friends with those who save our face)</i> |
|---|--|

The above proverb is intended to advice people to be cautious in choosing their spouse or friends. To marry is with the one who is *sipadan* or matches. In reference to Islamic study, to marry someone that matched us does not only mean suit us in appearance; good looking man should marry beautiful woman or vice versa, or to have equal economic and social status in the society. The most important thing is to marry a counterpart in religion as in the Al-Qur'an, Surah An-Nur verse 36 translated as:

“Vile women are for vile men, and vile men for vile women. Good women are for good men, and good men for good women; such are innocent of that which people say: For them are pardon and a bountiful provision”. (Al-Qur'an, Surah An-Nur verse 36)

In practice, good/pious people will seek to marry a pious spouse. Although it is rather complex to measure ones faith superficially, it is important to examine the quality of his/her religious deeds that should be reflected in the attitude of being ‘vile’ or ‘good’ as this quality determines what kind of family they will build and how they will raise their children. Nevertheless, it is crucial since a society is made up of families. The same is also the case in choosing friends as one’s character is often shaped by one’s associates. Since selecting friends or acquaintances is highly important in Acehnese society. A number of proverbs give warnings about not making friends with people with bad character. Some examples are as the following.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (16) <i>Ta-meuengon ngon banggi rôh</i><br><i>ta-meucandu</i><br><i>ta-meugon ngon teungku jeu</i><br><i>ta-meudo'a</i><br><i>ta-meurakan ngon ureueng malém</i><br><i>trép-trép jeu</i> | <i>(Make friends with an addict, we will be one)</i><br><i>(make friends with a preacher, we'll know how to pray)</i><br><i>(make friends with a pious man, we'll gradually become a preacher)</i> |
|--|--|

Note the alliteration, repetition of *ngon* in first three lines and rhyming at ends of first and final lines above. The following example also carries alliteration, repetition and rhyming for effect.

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|---|--|
| (17) <i>Bak ie raya, bèk ta-theuen ampéh</i><br><i>bak ie tarék, bèk ta-theun bubèe</i><br><i>bèk ta-meurakan ngon si paléh</i> | <i>(In floods do not put a fishing net)</i><br><i>(on a stream do not set a fish trap)</i><br><i>(do not make friends with a rascal)</i> |
|---|--|

*hareuta abéh, geutanyoé malèe* (our wealth will empty, we will be ashamed)

All the above proverbs suggest people that they have to be careful in selecting friends or companions. Over time our identity and attitudes are influenced by the people around us. We can become criminals if our friends are criminals, we can be a good person if we have good people around us in our circle of friends.

#### 4.2.3 Teaching Shyness as Part of Faith

Eastern culture is known for being modest as one of the elements of politeness. Part of being modest is acknowledging the notion of face in society (Harris, 2007, p. 122). *Malèe* or the culture of being ashamed of doing or saying something improper has been crystallized as part of etiquette in Acehese society. The Islamic teaching also reflects that being ashamed of negative traits is one aspect of a good Muslim. The following are some proverbs pertaining to this issue,

- (18) *Meunyoe malèe han teuntèe kanjai* (If we are ashamed, we will not be embarrassed)  
*meunyoe tawakai han binasa* (if we rely on God, we will not perish)  
*lagèe alèe tob beulacan* (like a pestle to pound shrimp paste)  
*nyang malée ureueng jak sajan* (those who are shamed are people who walk along)

This proverb is a satire about people with no sense of shame. Losing face is something people avoid since it is undignified. For a disgraced person, this sense is obviously meaningless as he/she consider their behaviour is acceptable or something that they should not be ashamed of. Nonetheless, it is the people who socialize or live with these persons who will feel embarrassed. The line *nyang malée ureueng jak sajan* is as a collective society, the positive and negative face (Harris, 2007, p. 122). The normative of being proper or improper, polite or impolite are agreed upon, controlled and maintained by the community as a whole rather than by individuals.

Below is a similar proverb to scorn a disgraced person.

- (19) *Geu-tak han meuparôt* (Slashing with a machete leaves no scar)  
*geu-carôt han malée* (mocking leaves no shame)

This saying is targeted at a shameless person since whatever is said or done is in vain as that person feels his/her negative behaviour is acceptable and normal.

#### 4.2.4 Advice on Child Rearing

- (20) *Yôh masa reubông han ta-tém ngieng* (While it is still a bamboo shoot, it's neglected)  
*'oh jeuet keu trieng han ék ta-puta* (when it is a bamboo tree, it cannot be twisted)

It is undisputed in all society that the foundations of learning should be established at a young age. This proverb advises parents to care for their children by educating them as early as possible. The word *reubông* refers to a bamboo shoot and *trieng* means bamboo. Literally, the proverb indicates that if during the period when the bamboo is still a shoot it is uncared for, when it grows into a bamboo tree, then it will be difficult to bend it as it is already hardened. So as in teaching children, the Acehnese people believe if good parenting starts too late, it will be difficult to change the children's attitude at a more mature age. One proverb from Sudan that also stresses the importance of early moral education is discussed by Ahmed (2010), which says "*Al-ilm fi al-s'ighar kelnaqshi fi alh'ajar*". In English it means "learning during youth is like sculpting stones" which means that "if moral values are taught since childhood, it will stick in their mind forever". The Acehnese also have another similar proverb about parenting as in:

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|---|---|
| (21) <i>Paloe reudeup seubab reumiet</i>    | (A poor shrub because of a small bug)           |
| <i>paloe aneuk miet seubab ureueng tuha</i> | (a naughty child because of the elders/parents) |

This proverb warns parents to set good examples for their children. As proverbs are excerpts of past experiences where wise people; often time the old ones, advice parents to be careful in speaking and behaving to their little ones. We know that children are like sponges as they absorb anything they receive through their senses, therefore every little thing that parents do will be copied by their children. The metaphor of this proverb is really suitable by comparing a *reumiet* (a small bug) with negative acts or speeches that often time are considered as something small or meaningless but can eventually damage the behaviour of our children. If the damage is unrepaired, the negative attitudes will remain and may get worse in later life as eventually the children will become parents themselves and history will repeat itself. More importantly, this particular proverb is the evidence that Acehnese proverb does not only select rhyming words as in *reumiet* and *aneuk miet* but also consider the meaning of *reumiet*; an insect that gradually destruct its host.

#### 4.2.5 Advice on Socializing/Conversing

Jesting is one of life's elements to stay young. It is used to melt situations, to avoid boredom and to create intimacy. Therefore, jokes are often used as ingredients in conversation. However, jesting too much by making fun of others may trigger misunderstandings that can lead to fights and quarrels. The following proverbs are examples:

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| (22) <i>Asai cabôk nibak kudée</i>          | (Scabs come from scabies)                         |
| <i>asai pakée nibak seunda</i>              | (quarrels come from jokes)                        |
| (23) <i>Leuepah langkah jeuet ta-riwang</i> | (If we walk too far, we can't turn back)          |
| <i>nariet karôt sia-sia</i>                 | (negative words once spoken cannot be taken back) |

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|--|--|
| (24) <i>Luka hatée salah paham</i><br><br><i>ingat rakan bèk leupah haba</i> | (Heartache is caused by misunderstandings)<br>(remember our friends do not talk thoughtlessly) |
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These proverbs also advice people to be wise in speaking or conversing. Although the aim of making jokes is to break the ice, but speaking thoughtlessly can harm friendships and even widen gaps in understanding that already exist.

#### 4.2.6 Advice to Not Mind Other People's Business

The followings are some Acehese proverbs related to this matter:

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|--|---|
| (25) <i>Alée di gob, leusông di gob</i><br><i>gata meutop, peukareuna?</i> | (Other's pestle, other's mortar)<br>(why did you get mashed?) |
|--|---|

It is similar to:

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|--|--|
| (26) <i>Buet gob bèk ta-rindu</i><br><br><i>meukumat iku, han ék ta-hila</i> | (Do not long for the work of other people)<br>(when a tail is stuck, it does not wave) |
|--|--|

This is comparable to:

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|--|---|
| (27) <i>Meung hana gatai</i><br><i>keupeu ta-garô?</i> | (If it is not itchy)<br>(why are you scratching?) |
|--|---|

It is an unwritten courtesy to not interfere in other people's affairs. English culture also acknowledges this idea with the saying "Don't poke your nose into other peoples' business". People do not like other people to show interest in situations which does not involve them as it violates the privacy of others. Acehese proverbs ridicule this attitude with phrases like *meukumat iku*, *meutop* and *ta-garô*. All those sayings remind us to keep our noses out of other people's business. These expressions clearly depict the situation where one can get into trouble for getting involved in things which are none of our business.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Proverbs in Acehese society play a significant role in building a harmonious society based on tradition and culture. More importantly, Acehese proverbs are a reflection of the Acehese personality. They usually contain messages about how to behave properly in society and how to build good relationships with others. They also teach the young to show respect to their elders and to those who are knowledgeable in society. Therefore it is certain that Acehese proverbs teach good philosophies of life, tradition and customs as well as morals and manners. Sadly, the attitude of the Acehese people towards proverbs has changed in recent years whereby most young people rarely use them in daily life. Based on this study, it is concluded that most young

people in Aceh do not know or do not use proverbs. This is certainly a threat to the sustainability of proverbs in the Acehnese, culture as more and more people do not pass this culture down to their children and other youngsters.

The scope of this study is limited to only a few compiled Acehnese proverbs related to education. A more comprehensive study should be done with a wider scope and with more diverse subject matter.

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