

CONTEXT IS KEY: THE IMPACT OF CONTEXTUAL CLUES ON ACEHNESE PROVERB COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to investigate the role of context in interpreting Acehneese proverbs. It was conducted on forty-two Acehneese students studying at Bumi Persada University in Lhokseumawe, Indonesia. Data were gathered via online questionnaires with multiple-choice questions. Respondents were invited to answer the questions in two sessions. Respondents' scores in the first session represent their ability to interpret the meaning of proverbs without context, whereas respondents' scores in the second session describe their ability to interpret the meaning of proverbs using context. Their scores from both sessions were compared to see if there were any gains between them. The result of the data analysis demonstrated that the average score of respondents answering questions about Acehneese proverbs with context increased when compared to the average score of respondents answering the same questions without context. This increase in score demonstrates the need for context when interpreting Acehneese proverbs.

Keywords: Acehneese proverbs; context; figurative meaning; implicit language; meaning interpretation

INTRODUCTION

Humans communicate thoughts and feelings in a variety of ways. Some people convey their thoughts and feelings explicitly, whereas others do so implicitly. In face-to-face interactions, human communication typically involves two central components, namely explicit verbal content and a substantial amount of unspoken information, such as nonverbal information (Stein, 2023). Each sort of way then has distinct qualities resulting in specific outcomes.

Proverbs are an example of implicit language. What is expressed in a proverb cannot be taken literally because it involves cultural components inherent in the speakers. Richardson et al. (2017) define proverbs as significant cultural products that convey and direct a culture's beliefs, behavior, and worldview. Proverbs and sayings are essential elements of any language, representing the collective wisdom, cultural values, and social norms of a community (Qizi Anvarova, 2025). Iakovleva and Nikolaeva (2016) also claim that any component of life experience that is

significant to culture will be represented in a collection of proverbs with the same meaning.

Proverbs are also associated with many languages and non-linguistic aspects, so the process of analyzing proverbs always includes context, or everything related to and influencing the meaning of the proverb. Proverbs employ literary language that is invariably strongly tied to various life settings, including morality, ethics, and the cultural norms of the culture in which they are read (Muntazar & Hajar, 2024). Therefore, examining the context of the proverb allows one to determine who was engaged in delivering the proverb, what their relationships were like, what transpired while and before the proverb was conveyed, how they conveyed and responded to the proverb, and other pertinent facts. This variety of facts will be important in determining the meaning of proverbs.

The existing body of literature has firmly established the critical role of context and cultural familiarity in proverb comprehension. Many studies have demonstrated that proverb comprehension is a dynamic process in which contextual cues influence interpretation at early

processing stages, and that familiar proverbs are processed more quickly and accurately than unfamiliar ones. Furthermore, research on the comprehension of figurative language has highlighted how factors such as concreteness and the complexity of communicative intent (e.g., sincerity vs. irony) directly impact a listener's ability to derive meaning (Bosco et al., 2009). Recent work in 2025 has extended these findings into the realm of computational linguistics, revealing systematic challenges for artificial intelligence models in handling figurative language across different cultures, a phenomenon termed the "culture gap" (Park et al., 2025).

However, a significant lacuna remains. While a large body of studies has investigated the relationship between context and the interpretation of proverbs, there is a notable paucity of research on the role of context in interpreting Acehnese proverbs. The extant research on Acehnese proverbs has primarily focused on a comparative semantic analysis with Indonesian proverbs, identifying shared and unique metaphorical domains (Iskandar et al., 2025). These studies, such as that by Iskandar et al. (2025), confirm that while some conceptualizations are shared, cultural and geographical factors lead to significant variations in metaphor types. Yet, they do not address the process of how context facilitates the comprehension of these proverbs for different types of speakers.

Besides, many proverbs lack equivalents in other languages (Assaqaf, 2019), and a similar phenomenon is true for Acehnese proverbs. Aceh has a rich cultural tradition, which is evident in its language, food, art, dance, and rituals (Yusuf & Yusuf, 2014). The situation makes it challenging for non-Acehnese speakers and Acehnese speakers unfamiliar with proverbs and figurative meanings to interpret Acehnese proverbs effectively. As a result, explaining the background of Acehnese proverbs will help Acehnese and non-Acehnese speakers interpret the proverbs.

The current study then attempts to fill this important informational gap by examining the role of context in the interpretation of Acehnese proverbs. This investigation advances research on figurative language comprehension beyond earlier findings in several critical ways. First, it

moves beyond the lexical and semantic comparisons of previous work (Iskandar et al., 2025) to explore the pragmatic and contextual dimensions of Acehnese proverb use. Second, by focusing on a specific, under-documented regional language, the study directly addresses the "culture gap" identified in recent figurative language research (Park et al., 2025), providing empirical evidence on how culturally specific knowledge shapes interpretation. Finally, it offers a novel perspective by examining how interpretive strategies might differ between native Acehnese speakers with cultural knowledge and those without such a background, thereby contributing to the broader understanding of cross-cultural figurative language processing.

The study's findings will assist both Acehnese and non-Acehnese speakers in interpreting Acehnese proverbs. The study's findings will also be useful for language teachers and learners, as well as policymakers seeking to preserve languages in the future.

Proverb and Context

Proverbs are simple, concise, concrete, and customary statements based on common sense or experience and are frequently metaphorical and use formulaic language, collectively forming a genre of folklore (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2024). Proverbs incorporate everyday experiences and common observations in short and formulaic language, making them easy to recall and immediately applicable as effective rhetoric in oral or written communication (Mieder, 2004).

Proverbs are typically written by native speakers of a language who are thought to be wise and have a superior understanding of the essence of life. Proverbs often contain social or moral principles as well as expressions of knowledge regarding various everyday life situations (Morsanyi & Stamenković, 2021). Proverbs have an important role in people's social lives (Al-Azzam, 2018) and represent cultural norms, beliefs, and dogmas, offering insights into how individuals perceive themselves and others (Mensah et al., 2024). Numerous studies have also found a close association between power, ideology, and proverbs (Van Dijk 2015; Fairclough 2013). Proverbs, as they embody social or moral

principles, are widely accepted and can be passed down to subsequent generations due to their widespread distribution.

Proverbs are a significant element of society since they were produced after serious thinking and are constantly accepted and used. They also play a crucial role in shaping people's ideas, values, and attitudes. Ibrahim and Usman (2021) believe that cultural values derived from proverbs are critical in forming people's personal and cultural identities. Mensah et al. (2024) have also found that proverbs can change gender norms and stereotypes in Russian and Ga cultures. In terms of education, proverbs are used to teach society about etiquette, advice (for example, how to choose life companions and friends, how to raise children, how to socialize and converse, and how not to mind other people's business), and shyness as a sign of faith (Nasir, 2015).

The production and use of proverbs in society imply that a succession of words in the form of proverbs is always linked together and can even reflect the existence of a community. Proverbs involve both linguistic and societal factors (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2024) and are a commonly utilized linguistic phenomenon that abstracts information through condensed phraseology while also representing wisdom, views, morality, traditions, social standards, and viewpoints (Ghafoori & Elyas, 2023).

The proverb's linkages to sociocultural factors render it inextricably linked to the context of the proverb speaker. Context can be a social phenomenon that arises and evolves through interactions between people who speak a language. During this interaction, language usage is greatly influenced by sociocultural reality and vice versa (Andriani et al., 2022). Language is a component of culture and has a considerable impact on how that culture evolves (Chinnam, 2023). Humans retain phonetically and contextually rich memories of previous language experiences, which are then used for speech production and perception (Hay, 2018). Therefore, incorporating the context may aid one in the interpretation of proverbs.

Context can also be expressed through intonation and body language, altering a speaker's meaning and intent. Bodies are rich and essential social stimuli that we frequently

experience inside social groups (Oswald et al., 2023). As a result, in face-to-face interaction, speakers need to pay attention to and comprehend tone and body language to ensure that exchanges flow smoothly and without misunderstandings. According to Stein (2023), misunderstanding a text message can be relatively simple: Without the ability to hear the other person's intonation or see their face, a critical piece of information may be lost along the way.

Aside from being context-bound, proverbs contain metaphorical meaning and implicit language that is intended to insinuate, order, or prohibit implicitly, convey something respectfully, or serve other purposes. The use of figurative meaning implies that the proverb cannot be read literally, but rather requires an awareness of the background and sociocultural phenomena of the speaker's community.

Interpreting Proverbs

Interpreting proverbs necessitates unique skills that differ from interpreting language in general. Interpreting proverbs might be challenging due to their cultural context and indirect nature (Daşkın & Hatipoğlu, 2019). Interpreters typically face difficulty when interpreting proverbs due to cultural variations and a lack of equivalents for some proverbs (Assaqaf, 2019). According to Jegede and Osoba (2019), proverbs can quickly reveal a people's cultural heritage and they contribute to understanding a people's historical evolution, life perspectives, and attitudes.

Furthermore, some proverbs contain subtle orders, prohibitions, praise, and ridicule (Khalsiah et al., 2018), which are only comprehended by certain people. Humans generally dislike being regulated by numerous rules and prohibitions, but they must be regulated anyway. Faced with these conditions, humans are nonetheless regulated by language that does not appear to regulate. Proverbs employ figurative language to govern humans in situations where they do not feel regulated. To grasp the meaning of proverbs, including these rules, everyone must first understand the linguistics and social phenomena of the proverb's speakers.

One way to interpret the meaning of proverbs is to place them in their social context,

specifically the situation or events surrounding their use. According to Jegede and Osoba (2019), proverbs are context-dependent, and it is difficult to determine the meaning of a proverb without the context in which it is used. Hay (2018) also claims that whenever a speaker says a word, he is transmitting not only a linguistic message but also a rich social message. According to Ebenso et al. (2012), to correctly interpret and use sayings, one must have exceptional expertise and knowledge of the kinship system, oral traditions, values, and attitudes of the people. This reliance implies that the interpretation of a proverb may only be grasped by paying attention to the context of the speech.

Contextualization is always linked to numerous factors, so it can only be done by experts (Zulkhairi et al., 2024). Billy (2013) also believes that knowledge of interpreting proverbs can be gained through formal or informal interactions with experts in a given language and its literature, sheer perseverance, consultation with elders who have proven proverb knowledge, and extensive reading of relevant literature. According to Ebenso et al. (2012), accurate interpretation and usage of proverbs necessitate a high level of expertise and knowledge, including kinship structure, oral tradition, people's values, and attitudes. It suggests that not everyone can interpret proverbs since it requires special abilities that are different from language interpretation in general.

METHOD

This qualitative study involved 42 Acehnese students enrolled in the faculties of teacher training and education at Bumi Persada University in Lhokseumawe, Indonesia. The participants comprised both male and female students, all of whom had completed their senior high school in North Aceh and Lhokseumawe.

Additionally, the participants were required to be between 19 and 23 years of age, a criterion established to examine young individuals' comprehension of Acehnese proverbs and to enhance their connection to this form of local cultural heritage. Furthermore, all participants were required to demonstrate proficiency in speaking Acehnese within family interactions,

a precondition intended to ensure effective understanding and communication in the Acehnese language.

The respondents were informed about the study and expressed their willingness to participate, provided their identities were kept confidential. To make it easier to identify and keep their identities anonymous, each respondent was assigned a respondent code, 1, 2, 3, and so on.

To collect the data, an online questionnaire comprising multiple-choice items was administered. The language of instruction employed in the questionnaire was Bahasa Indonesia, the national language, which is comprehensible to virtually all Indonesians, including the target respondents. The instrument consisted of ten questions, each corresponding to a ten Acehnese proverb. Both the proverbs and their meanings were derived from an authoritative source, namely *Peribahasa Aceh* (Acehnese Proverbs) by Hasjim (1977). This measure was intended to ensure the content validity of the research instrument.

The proverbs were selected by considering a variety of elements and styles common in Acehnese proverbs. These proverbs also represent different semantic categories, with some proverbs drawing comparisons through metaphors, while others depict contradictions and irony. In addition, some proverbs convey direct advice and guidance using figurative language.

Before the testing phase, respondents' familiarity with the proverbs was assessed using a Likert-scale instrument. Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency with which they had encountered each of the ten proverbs, selecting from five response options: (1) *Never* – I have never heard or read this proverb; (2) *Very rarely* – I have very rarely heard or read this proverb; (3) *Sometimes* – I have occasionally heard or read this proverb; (4) *Often* – I have frequently heard or read this proverb; and (5) *Very often* – I have very frequently heard or read this proverb and know its meaning.

The results of this preliminary assessment revealed that 11% of respondents reported never having encountered the proverbs, 18% reported very rare exposure, 34% indicated

occasional exposure, 21% reported frequent exposure, and 16% indicated very frequent exposure. The assessment suggests that the majority of respondents demonstrated only moderate to low familiarity with Acehese proverbs, as over 60% reported encountering them only occasionally, rarely, or never. This indicates a potential weakening of intergenerational transmission and everyday use of Acehese proverbial knowledge among young university students in the region.

To eliminate research bias, respondents were requested to complete the questionnaire in two sessions. Each session had a limited time (Domnich et al., 2015). Respondents were given 13 minutes for the first session and 18 minutes for the second session. The time allotted for the second session was longer because respondents were required to read conversations incorporating proverbs, which were not included in the first session's list of questions. In case the respondent has not completed all of the questions by the end of the time allotted, the respondent's replies are instantly transmitted, and the question display is closed. The time limitation is meant to prevent respondents from receiving answers from others, ensuring that the findings of this study are solely those of the respondents.

Research bias was also prevented by asking respondents to answer these questions in two consecutive sessions. Initially, respondents were asked to answer the question for the first session. Once they finished, they had to submit their answers. Respondents were then immediately asked to answer the questions for the second session. Once they finished, they were required to submit their answer. By limiting the amount of time available and being required to answer two consecutive question sessions, respondents are more likely to answer questions based on their expertise rather than seeking answers from others.

In the first session, the questions simply showed ten proverbs, and respondents were asked to determine the meaning of the proverb by selecting one of the correct answers. The questions for this first session can be found in Appendix 1. The respondents' answers were then evaluated and assigned a score. Each correct answer received a score of ten, while

incorrect answers received a score of zero. The score was then determined for the first session.

The second session's questions included the same proverbs as the first session's questions. It was only that during the second session, the proverb was employed in a conversation. This exchange is designed to demonstrate the context in which the proverb is given. According to Zibin and Altakhaineh (2014), the best way to understand the meaning of proverbs is to use them in a social context. Conversation is one approach to using proverbs in a social context. Through conversation, respondents are encouraged to imagine the context needed to interpret the proverb.

After reading the proverb in the conversation, respondents were asked to choose one of the correct options to establish the proverb's meaning. The set of questions for the second session is in Appendix 2. The respondents' answers were then evaluated and assigned a score. Each correct answer received a score of ten, while incorrect answers received a score of zero. The score was then determined for the second session.

Respondents' scores in the first session represent their capacity to interpret the meaning of proverbs without context, whereas respondents' scores in the second session describe their ability to interpret the meaning of proverbs using context. Their scores from the first and second sessions were compared to see if there were any gains between the two. These gain scores emphasize the importance of context in interpreting proverbs.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to determine the role of context in interpreting Acehese proverbs. The study compared respondents' scores for answering questions regarding Acehese proverbs with and without context. Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the respondents' scores in answering questions regarding proverbs without context and with context, respectively.

Table 1 shows that respondents' average score for answering questions about Acehese proverbs without context was 41.67. Because there were ten questions asked, each with a score of ten, the average score suggests that the typical respondent could only answer four of the ten questions correctly.

The average score of 41.67 is regarded as low because it remains less than 50. This score indicates that the respondents' ability to answer questions regarding Acehese proverbs without

context remains rather low. Moreover, respondent 9 and respondent 15 had a score of 10, indicating that they could only answer one out of ten questions correctly.

Table 1. Respondents' Scores in Interpreting Proverbs without Context

Respondent	Score for Question										Total Score
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1	0	10	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	10	30
2	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	10	10	0	30
3	10	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	10	30
4	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	0	30
5	10	0	10	10	0	10	10	0	0	10	60
6	10	0	0	0	0	10	0	10	0	0	30
7	0	10	0	0	10	10	0	0	10	10	50
8	0	0	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	0	40
9	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
10	10	10	10	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	70
11	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	0	0	10	30
12	0	10	10	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	30
13	0	0	0	10	10	0	10	0	10	0	40
14	10	10	10	0	0	10	0	10	0	10	60
15	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	10
16	0	0	10	10	0	10	10	0	10	0	50
17	0	10	10	0	10	0	0	10	0	10	50
18	10	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	20
19	0	10	10	10	10	0	10	0	10	10	70
20	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	10	0	30
21	10	0	10	0	0	10	10	0	0	10	50
22	0	10	0	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	50
23	0	0	10	10	0	0	10	0	0	0	30
24	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	10	40
25	0	0	10	10	10	10	0	0	10	0	50
26	0	0	10	0	0	0	10	10	0	10	40
27	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	30
28	0	0	10	10	10	10	0	10	0	10	60
29	0	10	0	0	0	0	10	0	10	0	30
30	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	10	0	10	30
31	10	0	10	0	10	10	0	0	10	0	50
32	0	10	0	10	0	0	10	10	0	10	50
33	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	20
34	10	0	0	0	10	10	10	10	0	10	60
35	0	10	10	10	0	10	0	0	0	0	40
36	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	10	10	40
37	10	0	10	10	10	10	0	0	10	0	60
38	0	10	0	0	0	10	10	10	0	10	50
39	0	0	10	10	0	10	0	0	10	0	40
40	10	10	0	0	10	0	10	10	10	10	70
41	0	0	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	10	30
42	0	10	0	0	10	10	10	10	10	0	60
Total											1750
Mean											41.67

Table 2 displays the respondents' scores for answering questions about Acehese proverbs with context. It shows that respondents' average

score for answering the questions was 69.76. Because there were ten questions, each with a score of ten, the average score means that the

average respondent successfully answered seven out of ten questions.

Table 2. Respondents' Scores in Interpreting Proverbs with Context

Respondent	Score for Question										Total Score
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1	10	10	0	0	10	0	10	10	0	10	60
2	0	10	0	10	0	10	10	10	10	10	70
3	10	0	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	10	60
4	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	10	10	0	60
5	10	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	0	10	80
6	10	10	0	10	0	10	10	10	0	0	60
7	0	10	0	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	80
8	10	0	10	10	0	10	10	10	10	0	70
9	10	0	10	0	0	10	10	0	10	0	50
10	10	10	10	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	90
11	10	0	10	0	0	10	10	10	0	10	60
12	10	10	10	10	0	0	10	10	10	0	70
13	0	10	0	10	10	10	10	0	10	0	60
14	10	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	0	10	80
15	10	10	0	0	10	0	10	10	0	0	50
16	10	0	10	10	10	10	10	0	10	0	70
17	0	10	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	10	80
18	10	0	10	0	10	10	0	10	0	10	60
19	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	0	10	10	90
20	0	10	0	10	0	10	10	10	10	10	70
21	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	0	0	10	70
22	10	10	0	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	80
23	10	0	10	10	10	0	10	10	0	0	60
24	10	10	0	0	10	0	10	10	0	10	60
25	0	10	10	10	10	10	10	0	10	10	80
26	10	0	10	10	0	10	10	10	0	10	70
27	10	10	0	10	10	0	0	10	10	0	60
28	10	0	10	10	10	10	10	10	0	10	80
29	10	10	0	10	0	10	10	0	10	0	60
30	0	10	0	10	10	0	10	10	0	10	60
31	10	10	10	0	10	10	0	10	10	10	80
32	0	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	0	10	70
33	10	0	10	10	0	0	10	10	10	10	70
34	10	10	0	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	80
35	0	10	10	10	10	10	10	0	10	10	80
36	10	0	10	0	10	0	10	10	10	10	70
37	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	0	10	0	80
38	0	10	10	0	10	10	10	10	0	10	70
39	0	10	10	10	0	10	10	10	10	0	70
40	10	10	10	0	10	10	0	10	10	10	80
41	0	0	10	10	10	0	10	0	10	10	60
42	0	10	10	10	10	10	0	10	10	0	70
Total											2930
Mean											69.76

Referring to Table 2, the average score of 69.76 is deemed sufficient because it exceeds 50. This score indicates that respondents' ability to answer questions regarding Acehese

proverbs with context is adequate. Moreover, respondents 10 and 19 had a score of 90, indicating that they were able to properly answer 9 out of 10 questions.

Table 3. Respondents' Scores in Interpreting Proverbs with and without Context

Respondent	Respondents' Score in Interpreting Proverbs		
	Without Context	With Context	Gain Score
1	30	60	30
2	30	70	40
3	30	60	30
4	30	60	30
5	60	80	20
6	30	60	30
7	50	80	30
8	40	70	30
9	10	50	40
10	70	90	20
11	30	60	30
12	30	70	40
13	40	60	20
14	60	80	20
15	10	50	40
16	50	70	20
17	50	80	30
18	20	60	40
19	70	90	20
20	30	70	40
21	50	70	20
22	50	80	30
23	30	60	30
24	40	60	20
25	50	80	30
26	40	70	30
27	30	60	30
28	60	80	20
29	30	60	30
30	30	60	30
31	50	80	30
32	50	70	20
33	20	70	50
34	60	80	20
35	40	80	40
36	40	70	30
37	60	80	20
38	50	70	20
39	40	70	30
40	70	80	10
41	30	60	30
42	60	70	10
Total	1750	2930	1180
Mean	41.67	69.76	28.09

Table 3 shows the comparison of respondents' scores for interpreting proverbs with and without context. Table 3 shows that all respondents' scores have increased. On average, their score increased by 28.09, demonstrating that their score for answering questions regarding Acehnese proverbs with context

increased by 28.09 when compared to the same question without context.

Figure 1 compares the respondents' scores in answering questions on Acehnese proverbs with and without context. The blue line at the bottom represents the respondent's score while answering questions about Acehnese proverbs without context, whereas the orange line at the

top represents the respondent's score when answering questions about Acehneese proverbs with context. Figure 1 also clearly indicates that

the scores of all respondents increased at various rates.

Figure 1. Respondents' Scores in Interpreting Proverbs with and without Context

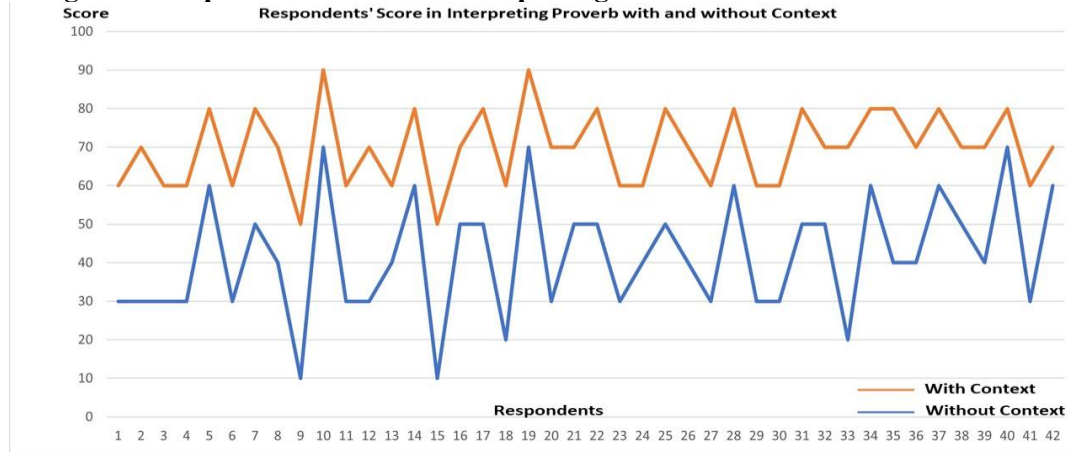
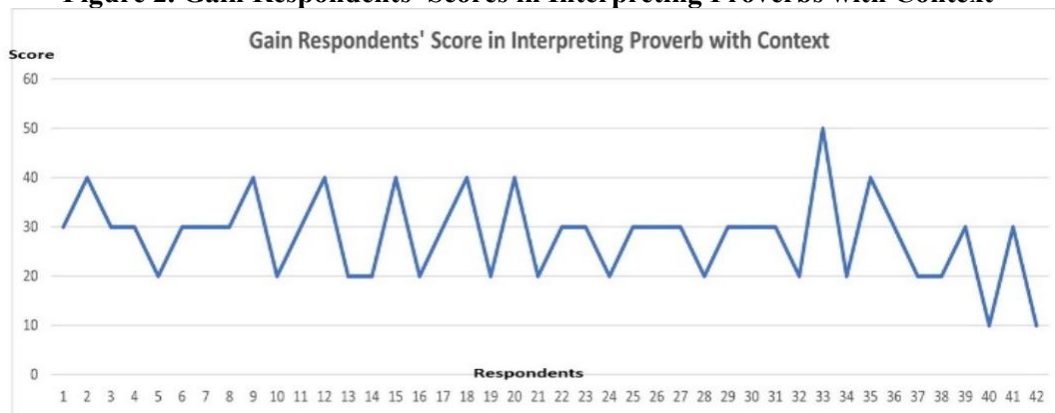


Figure 2 illustrates the variances in respondents' score gains after answering questions concerning Acehneese proverbs with context. Figure 2 shows that 13 respondents increased their scores by 30 points, while 7

respondents increased their scores by 40 points. In addition, respondent 33 demonstrated an increase of up to 50 points. Only respondents 40 and 42 demonstrated a 10-point increase in scores.

Figure 2. Gain Respondents' Scores in Interpreting Proverbs with Context



The data analysis reveals that respondents' average scores when asked about Acehneese proverbs without context were 41.67 and 69.76 with context. Their score has increased by 28.09. The increase in score demonstrates the need for context when interpreting Acehneese proverbs.

This study found that the average score of respondents answering questions about Acehneese proverbs with context was higher than the average score of respondents answering the same questions without context. This increase in score shows that context plays

a significant role in interpreting Acehneese proverbs.

From the perspective of relevance theory, these findings demonstrate that contextual information reduces the cognitive processing effort required for proverb interpretation while simultaneously enhancing the cognitive effects achieved (Ifantidou, 2025). According to the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure, readers automatically seek interpretations that yield the greatest cognitive effects for the least processing effort. When Acehneese proverbs are encountered without context, the readers must

engage in more extensive inferential work, drawing upon a broader range of assumptions to derive an interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance. The provision of context narrows the array of possible interpretations, allowing readers to access the text's intended meaning more quickly.

This aligns with Ifantidou's (2025) argument that pragmatic inference consists of multiple steps, transcending mere cognitive processes. It suggests that the highest benefit from relevant stimuli is not strictly propositional. The elevated scores in the contextual condition highlight that context enhances the inferential process by offering accessible assumptions, thereby optimizing the relevance of proverbs.

The findings also accord with contemporary contextualist semantics, which posits that linguistic meaning emerges from the structural configuration in which expressions are embedded rather than being inherent to expressions themselves. The meaning of a complex expression is influenced by both the meanings of its individual components and their organizational structure within the expression (Rambelli, 2024). Minami (2025) argues that individuals gain self-understanding not just through introspection but also through feedback from others, social roles, daily interactions, linguistic resources, and shared cultural meanings. O'Halloran (2023) also believes that we live in two realms: the material world and the world of meaning, the latter being intricate due to its interplay with physical, biological, and social systems, as well as the concept of meaning itself.

This theoretical framework explains why the same proverb can yield different interpretations depending on the contextual structure—comprising participants, background conditions, and discourse dynamics—within which it is processed. The present study's findings empirically validate this framework: when respondents had access to the contextual structure surrounding a proverb, they could selectively activate interpretive pathways that would otherwise remain unavailable.

Furthermore, the findings extend Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by demonstrating how metaphorical mappings are

activated and constrained by contextual factors. Teich et al. (2025) confirm that metaphors are fundamental linguistic and cognitive structures rather than just rhetorical figures. Complex systems tools revealed a metaphor network that systematically separates abstract and concrete categories, highlighting two key metaphorical processes: the mapping from concrete to abstract topics and the creation of new mappings within concrete domains. Proverbs, like metaphors, rely on mappings from a source domain (the literal content of the proverb) to a target domain (the situation being commented upon).

However, as Reda (2025) notes in her analysis of Kovecses's Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory (ECMT), figurative meaning is motivated by bodily experience, yet not predetermined, remaining open to contextual and culturally shaped variation. This openness to contextual variation is precisely what the present study captures: context acts as a selector, activating certain mappings from the multilevel conceptual system while inhibiting others. Without context, respondents may activate inappropriate or suboptimal mappings, leading to lower comprehension scores.

The findings of this study also support Salmani Nodoushan (2021), who states that in terms of context, what writers say is what they communicate, which includes what they write as well as what they intended, indicated, or left unwritten for the readers to discover. When delivering a proverb, the writer delivers an utterance, but it is not what the writer intends. What the writer means is exactly what is not conveyed, but is reflected in what is conveyed.

This is what distinguishes proverbs, which employ figurative language to express meaning indirectly. Within the conceptual blending framework (Bierwiazzonek, 2014), proverbs are best understood not as instances of the generic-is-specific metaphor but as conceptual integration networks. The specific content of the proverbs and the construal of the current target situation should be considered as input spaces, the generic level schema as the generic space, and the particular emergent meaning of the proverb in the current situation as the blend. The provision of context facilitates the construction of more felicitous blends by

enriching the target space with relevant situational information.

This study's findings also lend support to Vaughan et al. (2023), who argue that, while language names and meanings can be unambiguous and stable at times, they can also be context-bound or emergent. Andriani et al. (2022) also argue that linguistic analysis is inextricably linked to the social practices and context that shape language use. Context aids readers in comprehending the writer's meaning. To understand a proverb, readers must first understand the context and then apply it to their interpretation of the proverb. Iskandar et al. (2025) further demonstrate that metaphors in Acehese proverbs draw upon reference domains such as objects, plants, animals, spatial actions, and states, revealing a shared conceptualization of life experiences while also reflecting cultural specificity. The contextual information provided to respondents enabled them to map these metaphorical domains more accurately onto the situations being described.

The present findings also speak to the dynamic interplay between entrenched conceptual patterns and online meaning construction, as emphasized by ECMT. Reda (2025) explains that ECMT emphasises the existence of entrenched conceptual patterns that function as shared resources for meaning construction, while parole is recast as a dynamic, online semiotic process in which speakers construct mental spaces in real time, selectively activating and integrating these shared patterns to make sense of situated experience.

Acehnese proverbs represent such entrenched cultural patterns—metaphorical mappings that have stabilized through repeated use in discourse. When context is provided, respondents are able to engage in the online constructive process of selectively activating the appropriate entrenched patterns for the communicative situation at hand. Without context, this selective activation becomes more difficult, and respondents may access inappropriate mappings from the multilevel conceptual system. This dynamic view of meaning construction—as a process of selecting and integrating shared conceptual resources in response to contextual cues—offers a theoretically coherent explanation for

the observed difference in comprehension scores.

The increase in respondents' scores for answering questions regarding Acehese proverbs with context seems understandable. Respondents who do not grasp the meaning of a phrase or expression in a proverb may refer back to the preceding context to determine the meaning of the proverb. When the context arises, specifically when the proverb is employed as part of the conversation, respondents learn about what and how the message is given, who is engaged in the conversation, and the conditions that occur or constitute the background to the discourse. All these potentials assist respondents in determining the meaning of an Acehese proverb.

The inferential process, when supported by contextual structure, becomes more efficient and more accurate. As Ifantidou (2025) observes, the spontaneous formation of assumptions in the process of inference is often interspersed with spontaneous activation of emotions and images, those experiential resources which free up our limited cognitive resources. Context provides the experiential resources that facilitate this inferential process, leading to more accurate proverb interpretation.

CONCLUSION

The results of the data analysis in this study show that the average score of respondents answering questions about Acehese proverbs with context has increased compared to their average score on the same questions without context. This increase in score shows that context plays a significant role in interpreting Acehese proverbs. This is reasonable, as proverbs are always context-dependent, and describing the context in conversational form may aid respondents in interpreting Acehese proverbs.

However, this study only involved 42 students as respondents. To strengthen the findings, further study may examine the same object by involving a larger sample. This study also describes the context in the form of conversational text. Future studies may display the context in the form of visual media or audiovisual media. This study is also limited to proverbs in Acehese, while future studies may

examine the role of context in interpreting proverbs in other languages. A complete, comprehensive, and in-depth understanding will be obtained through various studies.

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Appendix 1

Questions about the Acehnese Proverb without Context

1. Apa yang tergambar dari peribahasa berikut? “Si uroe tujôh gö leuhô”
 - A. Gambaran orang taat
 - B. Gambaran orang ragu
 - C. Gambaran orang rajin
 - D. Gambaran orang yang suka menghayal
2. Apa makna peribahasa berikut? “Alèe di gob, leusông di gob. Gata meutop, peu kareuna”
 - A. Larangan meniru orang lain
 - B. Larangan mencampuri urusan orang lain
 - C. Anjuran menghargai waktu
 - D. Anjuran membantu orang lain
3. Apa makna peribahasa berikut? “Troh kapai pula lada”
 - A. Gambaran orang yang ingin menanam lada
 - B. Gambaran orang yang tidak membuat persiapan
 - C. Gambaran orang rajin
 - D. Gambaran orang sibuk
4. Apa makna peribahasa berikut? “Grôb guda, grôb cangguek. Ban meusuruek, ka patah pha”
 - A. Jangan lakukan sesuatu yang berat dan diluar kemampuan
 - B. Jangan sembarangan meniru orang lain
 - C. Jangan mengadu kuda dengan katak
 - D. Jangan bandingkan diri kita dengan orang lain
5. Apa makna peribahasa berikut? “Teungoh geupeulôt leuek, bèk tatiek mie”
 - A. Larangan mengadu balam
 - B. Anjuran untuk peduli dan membantu orang lain
 - C. Anjuran menceritakan sesuatu apa adanya
 - D. Larangan mengganggu percakapan orang lain
6. Apa makna peribahasa berikut? “Meunyo troe, tumpoe pih klat, meunyo deuek, ie abeuek pih mangat”
 - A. Nilai pemberian tergantung keikhlasan pemberi
 - B. Nilai pemberian tergantung nilai objek yang diberi
 - C. Nilai pemberian tergantung kondisi penerima
 - D. Nilai pemberian tergantung cara memberi
7. Apa makna peribahasa berikut? “Lheueh bak buya, meukeumat bak rimueng”
 - A. Seseorang yang terlepas dari terkaman buaya dan harimau
 - B. Penderitaan atau kesulitan yang datang bertubi-tubi
 - C. Anjuran untuk berhati-hati saat berada di hutan
 - D. Anjuran untuk tidak semena-mena dengan binatang buas
8. Apa makna peribahasa berikut? “Sia payah lôn limeuh leuhob, bacé ulôn drob kuah gob rasa”
 - A. Gambaran pekerjaan seorang tukang masak
 - B. Anjuran untuk mensyukuri apa yang ada
 - C. Hasil pekerjaan yang dinikmati oleh orang lain
 - D. Anjuran untuk bersabar
9. Apa makna peribahasa berikut? “Meunyo ék ta ayôn ngon taantôk, dalam bak jôk ji teubit nira”
 - A. Batang ijuk selalu mengeluarkan nira
 - B. Anjuran untuk tidak mencampuradukkan masalah pribadi dengan masalah publik
 - C. Setiap usaha dan jerih payah akan memperoleh hasilnya
 - D. Bertani adalah pekerjaan terbaik
10. Apa makna peribahasa berikut? “Ka tatuho ulèe éh jih”
 - A. Dikatakan kepada orang yang sering berkunjung ke rumah orang lain
 - B. Dikatakan kepada dua orang teman dekat

CONTEXT IS KEY: THE IMPACT OF CONTEXTUAL CLUES ...

- C. Dikatakan kepada orang yang angkuh dan suka menampakkan sesuatu yang sebenarnya tidak ada
- D. Dikatakan kepada orang yang ramah dan terbuka

Appendix 2

Questions about Acehnese Proverb with Context

- 1 Mawa : Si Basyah hana jadèh ji pula capli
Abuwa : Si Basyah cit sabé meunan. Buleuen nyang ka u likôt ji peugah ji pula kacang.
Jinoe ka ji peugah jipula kunyet. Buleun leumah alèh pue lom ji pula. Si uroe tujôh
gö leuhô.
Apa maksud Abuwa?
 - A. Si Basyah sering melaksanakan shalat dhuhur
 - B. Si Basyah adalah orang yang rajin
 - C. Si Basyah adalah orang yang sering ragu
 - D. Si Basyah adalah orang yang taat beribadah
- 2 Mawa : Lon deungo si Fatimah ka karu lom ngon lakoe jih. Pue beutôi?
Abuwa : Galak that ta uruh buet gob. Alèe di gob, leusông di gob. Gata meutop, peu
kareuna?
Apa maksud Abuwa?
 - A. Larangan meniru orang lain
 - B. Larangan mencampuri urusan orang lain
 - C. Anjuran menghargai waktu
 - D. Anjuran membantu orang lain
- 3 Mawa : Gob karab ji seumula, si Dolah barô ji rhah bijèh
Abuwa : Si Dolah sabé meunan. Trôh kapai barô ji pula lada.
Apa maksud Abuwa?
 - A. Si Dolah ingin menanam lada
 - B. Si Dolah tidak membuat persiapan
 - C. Si Dolah itu rajin
 - D. Si Dolah itu sibuk
- 4 Abuwa : Si Akob ka jadèh ji bloe lampôh di beurandéh. Tanyoe pue tabloe keudéh meu
siranté?
Mawa : Neupareksa dilée. Bèk grôb guda, grôb cangguek. Ban meusuruek, ka patah pha
Apa maksud Mawa?
 - A. Jangan lakukan sesuatu yang berat dan diluar kemampuan
 - B. Jangan sembarangan meniru orang lain
 - C. Jangan mengadu kuda dengan katak
 - D. Jangan bandingkan diri kita dengan orang lain
- 5 Abuwa : Ho keuh Rahmad, geupeugah lé guru, adék keuh si Mirza kayém that hana jitamong
sikula
Mawa : Si Marza cit kayém ji meu-utang bak keudè
Abuwa : Pakon meunan di gata. Teungoh ta peugah si Mirza ka ta peugah si Marza. Teungoh
tapeulôt leuek, ka tatiek mie.
Apa maksud Abuwa?
 - A. Mawa suka mengadu balam
 - B. Mawa selalu peduli dan suka membantu orang lain
 - C. Mawa selalu menceritakan sesuatu apa adanya
 - D. Mawa suka mengganggu pembicaraan orang lain

- 6 Abuwa : Jinoe si Leman rôt barôh ka kaya. Bunoe lôn peutaba ie u muda, meujipakoe pih tan.
Mawa : Meunyo troe, tumpoe pih klat, meunyo deuek, ie abeuek pih mangat
Apa maksud Mawa?
- A. Nilai pemberian tergantung keikhlasan pemberi
 - B. Nilai pemberian tergantung nilai objek yang diberi
 - C. Nilai pemberian tergantung kondisi penerima
 - D. Nilai pemberian tergantung cara memberi
- 7 Abuwa : Sayang that si Akôb, buleun nyang ka u likôt tutông rumoh, uroe nyoe ka jipoh lé gob.
Mawa : Lheueh bak buya, meukeumat bak rimueng
Apa maksud Mawa?
- A. Seseorang yang terlepas dari terkaman buaya dan harimau
 - B. Penderitaan atau kesulitan yang datang bertubi-tubi
 - C. Anjuran untuk berhati-hati saat berada di hutan
 - D. Anjuran untuk tidak semena-mena dengan binatang buas
- 8 Mawa : Pèng keurija bak Toké Dolah kalheuh geujôk?
Abuwa : Pane na. Sia payah lôn limeuh leuhob, bacé ulôn drob kuah gob rasa
Apa maksud Abuwa?
- A. Abuwa adalah seorang tukang masak
 - B. Anjuran untuk mensyukuri apa yang ada
 - C. Hasil pekerjaan yang dinikmati oleh orang lain
 - D. Anjuran untuk bersabar
- 9 Mawa : Meugoe nyang ka u likôt, hana göt wasé umöng blang barat. Meugoe kali nyoe ék na wasé?
Abuwa : Meunyo ék ta ayôn ngon taantôk, dalam bak jôk ji teubit nira
Apa maksud Abuwa?
- A. Batang ijuk selalu mengeluarkan nira
 - B. Anjuran untuk tidak mencampuradukkan masalah pribadi dengan masalah publik
 - C. Setiap usaha dan jerih payah akan memperoleh hasilnya
 - D. Bertani adalah pekerjaan terbaik
- 10 Mawa : Baroe si Basyah na jimeututô, jipeugah kabéh jibayeue yuem moto barô nyan.
Abuwa : Pue jipeugah. Ka tatuho ulèe éh jih
Apa maksud Abuwa?
- A. Abuwa sering berkunjung ke rumah si Basyah
 - B. Abuwa adalah teman dekat si Basyah
 - C. Si Basyah adalah orang yang angkuh dan suka menampakkan sesuatu yang sebenarnya tidak ada
 - D. Si Basyah adalah orang yang ramah dan terbuka