

The Toponymy and Etymology of Village Names along the West Coast of Aceh, Indonesia

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This research focuses on the process of naming places in Aceh, Indonesia, specifically in the districts of West Aceh and Nagan Raya. Toponymy, as the study of place names, encompasses the etymological analysis of their origins and meaning. By studying 29 villages along the West Coast, the patterns and factors influencing the naming process were investigated. Engaging with 29 informants, one from each village, including village chiefs and elders, oral histories of the names of the villages were collected. The findings revealed that geographical features dominated the naming patterns, with 13 villages named after natural elements such as trees and ponds. Other patterns that followed were geographical location, heritage structures, ancestral origins, landmark events or historical incidents, and local folklore. These six patterns represent the rich cultural heritage and strong connections to their land through the naming process. The study's findings provide valuable insights into the etymology of place names, enabling a better understanding of these communities' cultural identity and historical significance.

Keywords: *Aceh, ecology, etymology, toponymy, West Aceh*

1 Introduction

The name of a place is not merely a geographical marker but also reflects the unique insights and fundamental perspectives of the community (Alasli 2019). Local place names carry profound meanings and emotional bonds, reflecting the inhabitants' connection to their environment. These toponyms capture cultural identity and geographical conditions (Vuolteenaho 2017). They serve as essential references that reveal human interactions with their surroundings and sustain life (Taylor 2016). Understanding the origins of place names requires exploring environmental cues and community insights. Thus, place names provide insight into individuals' perceptions of their surroundings and their emotional ties to their habitat, offering valuable understandings of community identity and connection to the land.

Place names in Aceh commonly incorporate national, local, and foreign languages, revealing a distinct pattern in the region's toponymy. This pattern is mirrored in Indonesia, where over 1,500 villages use local language names that often reference mountains, rivers, and bays (Lauder & Lauder 2015). In spite of some studies, toponymic research in Aceh remains limited. Aziz et al. (2023) conducted a study on the genesis and generic patterns of toponyms in Aceh, focusing on the Banda Aceh and Greater Aceh areas; thus, further research is needed to explore similar cases in different locations within the province. This research aims to minimize the lack of information and references on toponymy in Aceh, which often leads to speculation about the origins of place names. Variations in the naming process of a place, such as those beginning with *suak* 'cove', *cot* 'plateau', and *drien* 'durian', warrant investigation into their patterns and relationships. Thus, this study aims to explain the etymology and naming process of the area, thus contributing to the existing literature.

Based on the background provided, the research problem of this recent study aims to investigate the correlation between the *toponymy* (place names) of villages and the

geographical features of those villages, as evidenced by the etymology (origin and meaning) of the place names in Aceh, particularly in the districts of West Aceh and Nagan Raya. It is hoped that the findings of this research would serve as a helpful source of information on the history of Aceh and the meanings behind the names of various locations. Overall, this study has the potential to be a valuable resource for many individuals.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Onomastics

Onomastics is the study of proper names, particularly names of persons (anthroponyms) and places (toponyms), within the discipline of linguistics. An onomastician is an individual who investigates the genesis, distribution, and variations of proper names. According to Hough (2016), onomastics is both an ancient and modern discipline. Names have long been recognized as essential to the study of language, tracing back to Ancient Greece, and provide insight into human communication and the organization of their world. However, the study of name origins has been relatively recent, emerging in the 20th century in some areas and continuing to develop in others. Thus, onomastics investigates the identification of proper names. According to Bright (2003), various fields of scholarship, including philosophy and history, have shown an interest in onomastics, or the study of proper names. Such research is typically conducted as part of broader disciplines such as linguistics, ethnography, philology, history, philosophy, and others.

2.2 Etymology

Etymology is a discipline that investigates the roots, authentic essence, and significance of words. It probes the historical connections between different languages, encompassing not only linguistic matters but also the complete historical context of place names (Hausner, 2017). Mailhammer further expands on this by introducing the concept of ‘contact etymology’ which emphasizes how linguistic interaction may influence the naming process (Mailhammer 2013). The study of word origins is known as etymology. All languages around the world have evolved; while many terms have been part of a certain language for a long time, new words are constantly being added. According to Durkin (2009), etymology is the investigation of word histories, particularly focusing on uncertain facts where a hypothesis is necessary to explain a word’s origin or historical stage. Toponymy and etymology are closely connected. Toponymy studies place names, their origins, and usage, while etymology studies the origins and historical development of words. In toponyms, etymology is crucial when searching for the true meaning behind place names (Coates 2013). In the study of Old-World toponymy, there is a strong emphasis on thorough research, particularly focusing on etymology and significance.

2.3 Toponymy

Toponymy is the study of the origin and meaning of place names, including their typology, use, and environmental influences (Perono Cacciafoco & Cavallaro 2023). A toponym can denote a geographical entity or serve as a general term for any location, often derived from its geographic features or significant sites (Helleland 2002). Tent and Blair have contributed significantly to the classification of toponyms, providing a topology that helps to analyze the

motivation for the naming process (Tent and Blair 2011). This approach provides a foundation to decode the Aceh toponyms. Likewise, Stewart's classical work regarding toponymic categories like the descriptive, associative, and commemorative names forms one of the primary bases for understanding the cultural and historical sources of the naming process (Stewart, 1975). Place names are cultural artifacts shaped by the relationship between language and environment (Helleland 2002). Humans generate place names in response to their environment, reflecting their need for habitation, recreation, rituals, and travel (Hough, 2016). Sociocultural factors like ideology, politics, and economy influence place names, leading to new names or alterations reflecting cultural and political dynamics (Nurhayati 2018; Rose-Redwood et al., 2010). Two theoretical naming methods exist: spontaneous and baptismal. The former arises from a lexicalization process based on the subject, object, condition, and environment, while the latter involves authorization, formality, resolution, administrative, and temporal considerations (Helleland 2002), illustrating how collective perceptions shape place naming.

As previously mentioned, place names often reflect the geographical location or landscape characteristics of an area. Naming these locations results from intentional human interactions with nature, typically based on physical features. While geographic names may sometimes arise unintentionally, they often carry intentional attributions related to the surrounding environment, suggesting a deliberate connection with nature (Nurhayati 2018). Landscape-associated features inform the choice of place names, supplemented by local attributes like elevation, facilitating location distinction (Villette 2021). Additionally, place names often signify historical significance, reflecting the rich history and reasons for settlement (Helleland 2012). Past events imbue emotional associations, shaping lived experiences and cultural narratives passed down through generations (Gjesdal 2019). Place names thus become part of cultural heritage, conveying meanings beyond mere location markers (Kostanski & Puzey 2014).

Moreover, the naming of places is intertwined with plant names, reflecting cultural identity through metaphorical associations (Onchoke 2021). Plant names signify cultural significance and contribute to local heritage and identity, fostering pride and community cohesion (Shackleton 2018). As primary domains, plant names influence the naming process, shaping the meanings associated with specific locations.

2.4 Linguistic landscapes

Linguistic landscape, as introduced by Duizenberg (2020), explores the visible presence of languages in various environments, revealing their connection with geographical and historical contexts (Sarah 2018). Kövecses (2006) highlights the influence of surrounding landscape, history, and people on place naming, reflecting cultural realities and worldviews. Onchoke (2021) further examined this interaction between language and culture through toponymy, emphasizing the deep connection between them. These concepts describe the complex relationship between language, culture, and the physical world, shaping human perceptions and interactions with their surroundings.

Hausner (2017) asserts the significance of historical and cultural factors in community-driven place naming, which represents a location's identity and distinguishing characteristics. Helleland (2002) expanded on this notion, noting that place names signify cognitive awareness, emotional attachment, and community development levels. Early theories suggest that individuals or entities highlight a region's memorable elements through place naming to create

lasting impressions (Helleland 2002). Overall, these insights emphasize the versatile nature of linguistic landscapes and toponymy, enriching understanding of their roles in shaping societal perceptions and interactions.

3 Methods

3.1 Research design

This study investigates the toponymy of place names in the environmental ecosystems of West Aceh and Nagan Raya districts in Aceh, Indonesia, using a methodology rooted in the field of linguistics and language documentation. This framework emphasizes the importance of systematic data collection, cultural sensitivity, and validation in fieldwork (Everett 2009) and (Bowern 2015). Additionally, this study draws on the principles of Cultural Anthropology to understand the sociohistorical context of naming practices. This research primarily focused on local residents and used three main methods: in-depth interviews, photo documentation, and secondary data analysis to explore the relationship between place names and regional ecosystems. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 29 informants—one from each village—using open-ended questions to determine the oral history of the village name, including village heads, elders, and other respected community members. Village heads provide administrative insights, while elders provide historical perspectives and folklore. The respondents were selected based on their recognized authority and knowledge within their communities, ensuring that the data obtained was accurate and culturally significant. Given its descriptive qualitative nature, accurately quantifying sensations, attitudes, and actions is challenging. However, this approach enables researchers to intricately depict the nuances of experiences, emotions, and thoughts during specific events or periods of interest (Tenny, Brannan, & Brannan 2017).

3.2 Research location

The study focuses on 29 villages along the west coast of Aceh, specifically in West Aceh and Nagan Raya districts, chosen for their diversity in toponymy. Each village represents a unique blend of cultural, historical, and geographical significance, requiring careful investigation. The research studies the toponymy of these villages by examining their historical, cultural, and linguistic foundations to understand the origins and significance of their names. The analysis explores whether names are derived from historical figures, cultural heritage, geographical features, or other influences, while also investigating how these names have evolved over time.

3.3 Data collection

For data collection, in-depth interviews were conducted, with the second researcher acting as the key instrument (Ary et al. 2010). Engaging with 29 knowledgeable individuals from each village, including village chiefs and elders, the researchers gathered oral histories from them on the names of the villages. The respondents, primarily Indigenous residents of the villages in West Aceh and Nagan Raya, were asked about the origins of the local place names. These interviews collected primary research data, and the recorded oral histories were analyzed.

3.4 Data analysis

The researchers followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for thematic analysis, providing a systematic framework. This approach enabled the researchers to identify and explore themes in the qualitative data. By organizing and describing the dataset while examining recurring themes, the researchers aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding and present meaningful insights. Thematic analysis facilitated a systematic exploration and helped identify key emerging themes.

4 Results

The 29 village names in West Aceh and Nagan Raya have diverse origins, resulting from various processes and six distinct patterns. These patterns in the naming process include geographical features, geographical locations, heritage structures, ancestral origins, landmark events or historical incidents, and local folklore. A number of 13 village names originated from geographical features, 5 from geographical location, 3 from heritage structures, 3 from ancestral origins, 3 from landmark events or historical incidents, and 2 from local folklore (see Table 1). These six patterns align with the broader concept of "toponymic systems" (Perono Cacciafoco & Cavallaro 2023), which organizes place names into systematic categories based on cultural, geographic, and historical contexts. Each of these naming processes contributes to the rich toponymy in the region, reflecting the cultural, historical, and natural influences that shape the identity of each place.

Table 1: Process of naming place names in West Aceh and Nagan Raya

No	Naming process	Village names	Sum
1	Geographical features	<i>Drien Rampak, Ranup Dong, Beureugang, Rangkileh, Keude Aron, Kuala Trang, Cot Rambong, Padang Rubek, Kabu Blang Sapek, Pulo Ie, Peuleukung, Ie Beudoh, Drien Tujoh</i>	13
2	Geographical location	<i>Cot Darat, Gampa, Seuneubok, Pasi Aceh Tunong, Pasi Aceh Baroh</i>	5
3	Heritage structures	<i>Mesjid Tuha, Meunasah Rayeuk, Mesjid Baro</i>	3
5	Ancestral origins	<i>Suak Ribee, Purwodadi, Purworejo</i>	3
5	Landmark or historical events	<i>Paya Lumpat, Alue Gajah, Pante Ceureumen</i>	3
6	Local folklore	<i>Krak Tampai, Suak Puntong</i>	2
Total			29

4.1 Geographical features

As many as 13 villages in West Aceh and Nagan Raya had names derived from distinct geographical features, signifying the bond between communities and their natural surroundings. For example, some villages adopt names referring to prevalent trees or plants, while others are inspired by natural phenomena such as rivers, hills, or valleys. These names highlight the importance of natural elements in shaping village landscapes and residents' lives. Moreover, they show the rich natural resources and varied ecosystems present in the region.

4.1.1 *Plants and trees*

There were 10 villages whose names originated from plants and trees that were dominant in their areas, respectively. The first is the village of Drien Rampak, which earned its name from a noteworthy durian tree. The iconic Acehese tree, esteemed for its cultural significance, has become a defining feature in the village landscape. Thus, residents honored it by naming their settlement, Drien Rampak. This name now embodies the village's reverence for the durian tree and its vital role in local culture and the economy. This signifies the community's deep connection to nature and appreciation of the abundant resources it provides.

Ranup Dong village has a name based on the beautiful landscape of the village's history. In ancient times, the village had a cluster of betel vine plants deliberately cultivated on a teak tree trunk, creating an attractive sight. Inspired by this, the villagers named their settlement Ranup Dong, reflecting the appealing image of betel vines adorning the teak tree.

The name Beureugang Village originated from a significant natural feature near the village—a large tree that once stood prominently nearby. This majestic tree, known as Beureugang, captured the admiration of the local community in the village's early days. As the village grew, Beureugang became synonymous with the entire community. Today, the name continues to embody unity, appreciation for nature, and a sense of heritage passed down through generations.

The story of Rangkileh Village begins in the early 1800s, when Indian brickmakers arrived in the village. As they transported their bricks, they encountered unique plants along the pathway, which inspired the name Rangkileh, likely derived from the distinctive sour fruit flavor. This name reflects the historical interaction with diverse cultures and remains integral to the village's identity. Today, Rangkileh symbolizes the village's past, serving as a cherished link to its history and the memorable encounter between Indian traders and the distinct flora.

Keude Aron village is named after its central market location surrounded by lush *aron* or pine trees. The term *keude* denotes a market, while pine trees are seen in the vicinity. This name mirrors the village's importance as a bustling trading hub and evokes the beautiful landscape reflected in the pine trees. It highlights both the village's economic role and nature's beauty.

The name Drien Tujoh Village originates from the presence of seven naturally growing durian trees in the village, symbolizing community sharing and harmony with nature. *Drien* denotes 'durian', while *tujoh* denotes 'seven', representing the number of durian trees. This name reflects the village's identity and the communal ownership of the fruit-bearing trees, encouraging cooperation and mutual support among the villagers. Regrettably, all the durian trees have since been cut down, marking a poignant change in the village landscape. Nonetheless, the legacy of *Drien Tujoh* endures as a testament to the village's past unity and connection with its natural surroundings.

Cot Rambong village had its name from the transformation of a pristine forest into a bustling plantation and village, initiated when the king of Kuala Trang offered the land as a reward for development. The story of King Kuala Trang is mentioned as a result of local stories by the informants, which were published around the 1800s. Thus, as the settlers began cultivating the area, it evolved into a thriving agricultural community. The name reflects the village's elevated location (*cot*, meaning 'plateau, high') and the abundance of majestic *rambong* or rubber fig trees in the vicinity. These trees symbolize the area's unique charm and catalyze its development. Thus, Cot Rambong not only describes the village's geographic features but also commemorates its journey from untouched wilderness to a flourishing settlement, depicting the resilience and dedication of its inhabitants.

The village of Padang Rubek had its name deeply rooted in its landscape, highlighting its expansive fields and the significant presence of the *rubek* tree. In Latin, it is known as a high-calotropis gigantea tree. *Padang* denotes ‘wide, open field’ in Acehnese, suggesting the village’s spacious and distinctive terrain. In the middle of this landscape, the *rubek* trees hold cultural and ecological importance. Combining these features, the villagers named their settlement Padang Rubek.

Originally named after a type of tree that the Acehnese call *kabu*, the village of Kabu Blang Sapek underwent a name change due to administrative confusion over subsidies. To distinguish it from another village named Kabu, the chief requested that the name be changed. *Blang*, signifying rice fields, highlights the village’s agricultural landscape, while *sapek* represents a culturally significant tree. Thus, Kabu Blang Sapek emerged, ensuring subsidy clarity and reflecting the village’s identity, which is tangled with rice fields and the revered *sapek* tree.

The name of Peuleukung village has a meaningful origin that is directly linked to the presence of a prominent tree in the vicinity of the village called *peulekung*. This majestic tree, known for its large size and distinctive characteristics, played a significant role in the naming of the village. Inspired by the impressive appearance and significance of *peulekung*, the villagers decided to name their settlement Peuleukung. The name reflects this remarkable tree, which likely became a landmark and point of reference for the community.

4.1.2 *Estuaries*

The name of Kuala Trang Village is significant as it dates back to the Aceh Sultanate era, specifically under Tengku Di Trang’s leadership. The informants assumed that the event was in the late 1800s. It is associated with the nearby glowing estuary, a unique natural phenomenon that gained local admiration, as expressed by an informant who remarked on its perpetual brightness. This distinctive feature likely left a lasting impression that contributed to the village’s name.

4.1.3 *Water springs*

A number of the two villages had their names derived from water springs. The first is Pulo Ie village’s name, which is intriguingly tied to a water spring within its vicinity, whose unique formation resembles an island. *Pulo* means ‘island’ in Acehnese, and *ie* is ‘water’. Inspired by this, the villagers named their settlement Pulo Ie, emphasizing its visual resemblance and natural beauty.

The second one is the Ie Beudoh village’s name which holds profound meaning, rooted in its geographical features and a central water spring. As *ie* signifies ‘water’, *beudoh* means ‘up’, suggesting water springing up, reflecting the spring’s characteristics. This water source not only sustains the community but also marks a significant event in the village’s history. The informants informed us that there was once an incident where a child from another village tragically drowned in the water spring of Ie Beudoh. This incident likely had a lasting impact on the villagers and became a part of the village’s collective memory.

4.2 *Geographical location*

Another significant category of village names originates from the geographical location of the villages. Three village names are derived from the specific area or region in which the villages are situated, such as nearby rivers, forests, or distinctive landscape features. The study

illustrates how geography has shaped settlement patterns, livelihoods, and cultural practices in West Aceh and Nagan Raya communities.

4.2.1 *Topography*

The village name Cot Darat originates from its geographical setting, characterized by highland areas surrounded by swampy terrain. *Cot* in Acehnese denotes a ‘highland’, while *darat* means ‘dry land’ above water level. Chosen by villagers, the name aptly describes their settlement’s geography.

Then there is Gampa, which was originally named Gampong Lam Paya, which translates to ‘the village in the swamp’ in Acehnese. This name probably originated from the geographical characteristics of the area, which is characterized by swampy terrain. The term *lam* means ‘in’ or ‘within’, while *paya* refers to a ‘swamp or marshland’. Therefore, Gampong Lam Paya directly describes the village’s location within a swamp. Over time, linguistic changes and the natural evolution of language have led to the gradual simplification of names. In this case, it transformed into Gampa. Hence, Gampa may also derive from the swampy terrain that causes ground tremors. In Acehnese, ground tremors or earthquakes are known as *geumpa*.

In its early days, the areas of Seuneubok are still untouched. It was a dense forest uninhabited by humans, and trade activities were conducted in Rundeng Village nearby. In 1910, King Meulaboh’s decree prompted pioneers from Rundeng, led by Ismail or Apa Ma Ee, to clear forests for agriculture. They began opening up new lands (known as *Teubok Hutén*, literally meaning ‘clearing the forest’) for agriculture and started planting various crops, including spices like pepper. As more people settled in the area, drawn by the opportunities of agriculture and the promise of a new life, Seuneubok or Gampong Seuneubok (literally translated as Seuneubok Village) emerged. Its name embodies its transformation from a forest into a prosperous agricultural settlement, a testament to the pioneers’ dedication.

4.2.2 *Land orientation*

Two village names were based on land orientation. The first is the village of Pasi Aceh Tunong, which has its roots in the geographical features and orientation of the village. The term *pasi* likely refers to ‘river’ or ‘riverbank’ in Acehnese. As the village is situated near a river, the name Pasi reflects this significant geographical element. Additionally, the word Aceh in the village name indicates the region or province in which the village is located, suggesting its connection to the broader area of Aceh. The word *tunong* is derived from Acehnese and translates to ‘north’. This portion of the name signifies the village’s location in the northern region of Aceh. Similarly, the next village, Pasi Aceh Baroh, shares a similar reasoning with Pasi Aceh Tunong, but with a distinct geographical orientation. However, the term Baroh in the village name means ‘south’ in Acehnese. This element highlights the village’s specific location in the southern region of Aceh.

4.3 *Heritage structures*

Three villages were named after nearby historical structures. This highlights the significant influence of these landmarks on local culture and traditions. The villages selected these names to pay homage to their heritage and commemorate the significance of these historical sites that connect to their past to preserve their history. This discovery highlights the ongoing importance

of the past to present-day communities. Exploring additional village names could further reveal narratives about how history has shaped the culture and identity of these regions.

Mesjid Tuha is named after the region's oldest mosque, signifying its historical importance. *Tuha*, translating to 'old' in Acehnese, stresses the mosque's heritage and cultural significance. This name reflects the enduring religious traditions and deep-rooted connection of the community to their place of worship across generations.

Mesjid Baro means the 'New Mosque', originating from the construction of a mosque during the Aceh Sultanate era in the 16th or 17th century to address accessibility issues faced by the local community. With only two mosques in the region, attending Friday prayers was challenging due to distance. To alleviate this, villagers proposed building another mosque for convenience. The initiative resulted in the naming of the village, Masjid Baro, to commemorate the establishment of the new mosque and its role in facilitating religious practices for the locals.

In Meunasah Rayeuk, the prayer hall formerly known as Meunasah Tameh underwent a name change to honor a significant pillar within the structure. Renamed in tribute to the impressive pillar, *rayeuk*, meaning 'big, large', signifies its massive and majestic nature, highlighting the influence of religious sites' history.

4.4 *Ancestral origins*

Village names in this category are linked to the origins of the village's inhabitants. The three village names reflected the ancestral roots and historical background of the people who first settled in the areas. These features affirm the heritage and cultural diversity of the community.

4.4.1 *Acehnese origins*

The village of Suak Ribee in the Suak Ribee Subdistrict has a captivating history that is deeply intertwined with local history. Originally part of Kuta Padang village, Suak Ribee later emerged as an independent settlement. Its name honors a remarkable woman known as Nek Rubee (*nek* is 'grandma'), who hailed from Reubee, Pidie area in Aceh. Nek Rubee's journey, during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636), led her family to settle near Suak, a promising location offering access to the sea for fishing and maritime activities. Over time, Nek Rubee and her family became integral to the community, prompting the villagers to rename their settlement Suak Ribee in her honor. This heartfelt tribute acknowledges Nek Rubee's significant contributions and the coastal bay's role in shaping the village's identity and livelihood.

4.4.2 *Non-Acehnese origins*

The village of Purwodadi in Nagan Raya has a poignant connection to its Javanese settlers' origins. Initially named after their hometown in Java, Purwodadi, these pioneers played a crucial role in establishing plantations and shaping the community's foundations. Their decision to name their new settlement, Purwodadi, is a tribute to their roots and ancestral ties, preserving the memories and heritage of their hometown while establishing a new life in Nagan Raya.

Likewise, Purworejo village in Nagan Raya is also significantly tied to its founding settlers who migrated from Java and named the village after their hometown. This naming practice reflects a strong bond to their Javanese roots and serves as a means of preserving their cultural identity in their new settlement. Over time, Purworejo has evolved into a unique blend of local culture and Javanese heritage, with its name symbolizing the community's rich history

and migration journey. These instances highlight how human settlement and migration shape the naming of places, which represent the cultural and ancestral heritage of the local population.

4.5 *Landmark events or historical incidents*

Certain villages derive their names from significant historical events, reflecting pivotal moments in their past. A number of three villages were found to serve as links to the community's history, preserving the stories and legacies of their ancestors. They capture the events that have shaped the community's identity, providing a glimpse into their traditions and cultural heritage.

4.5.1 *Landmark events*

The name Paya Lumpat village is based on the village's early days as a plantation. It stemmed from a colloquial exchange in Cot Seumeurung, where one person remarked, "You have to jump if you want to go there," referring to the challenging terrain with swamps. This phrase, "*payah lumpat*" meaning 'must jump', denoted the need to leap over the swamps and was associated with the area. Over time, the name underwent linguistic evolution, dropping the /h/ to become Paya Lumpat. This transformation reflects natural language progression within the community, preserving the historical essence while adapting to familiarity. Today, Paya Lumpat honors the village's past, symbolizing its resilience and evolution amid challenging terrains.

4.5.2 *Historical incidents*

The name Alue Gajah Village has an enthralling history based on a recurring event from the village's early days. *Alue* means 'tributary', while *gajah* is 'elephant'. An elephant frequently traversed a trail in the Nagan Raya region, thus shaping the region's identity. Tragically, an encounter with this elephant led to the loss of an early village chief's life, leaving a profound impact on the community. Today, Alue Gajah village stands as a historical marker, honoring the memory of the elephant's trail and the chief's sacrifice.

The village's name, Pante Ceureumen, originated from an interesting event during the early days of Aceh. At that time, a respected leader, known as *Ulee Balang*, called all the villagers to gather in a field. The limited cosmetic tools led many to apply face powder, prompting them to admire their reflections in the nearby river. This event inspired the name Pante Ceureumen, with *pante* meaning 'riverbank' and *ceureumen* meaning 'reflection'. This image commemorates the villagers gathering along the riverbank, captivated by their powdered faces in the water. This historical naming practice remains a charming reminder of the village's past.

4.6 *Local folklore*

The village name of Krak Tampai exemplifies how local folklore influences the region's toponymy. *Krak* in Acehnese means 'rice crust', while *tampai* means 'patching or mending a cauldron'. The story revolves around a poor woman who borrowed a cauldron from a wealthy family to cook rice. Accidentally damaging the cauldron, she prayed for help. When she returned, the cauldron miraculously appeared intact. Seeing this as a divine intervention, the villagers named their settlement Krak Tampai, symbolizing the miraculous event with a cauldron.

Finally, the name Suak Puntong Village is linked to both the village's geography and local folklore. *Suak* in Acehnese means 'a bay or inlet', indicating one near the village. *Puntong* means "stub or something that has been cut off from its intact". Here, *puntong* describes the bay as either closed or isolated. This name stems from the bay's distinctive appearance of being cut off from the larger body of water. Moreover, local folklore contributes to the village's story, with legends of catching tailless fish, known as *puntong* in Acehnese, and sightings of tailless crocodiles adding mystique to the area's narrative.

5 Discussion

To improve the understanding of these findings, this research incorporates the notion of "toponymic system" as outlined in Perono Cacciafoco & Cavallaro (2023, Chapter 1.7). A toponymic system is a structured and systematic process used to create, categorize, and organize place names within a particular cultural, geographic, and historical context. This concept provides a theoretical framework for analyzing how the village names collected in West Aceh and Nagan Raya fit into broader patterns of naming and cultural expression.

The application of the toponymic system framework revealed six naming patterns were identified—geographical features, geographical locations, heritage structures, ancestral origins, important events, and local folklore. The study of the toponymy (place names) of villages in West Aceh and Nagan Raya districts offers interesting findings on the relationship between local communities and their geographical surroundings (Alasli 2019; Vuolteenaho 2017; Taylor 2016). Through an investigation of etymology and toponymy, this research uncovers the diverse origins and meanings behind village names, shedding light on the connections between language, culture and the environment (Hausner 2017; Helleland 2002).

The findings of the study reveal six significant patterns in the naming of villages, reflecting the rich cultural heritage and geographical diversity of the region (Nurhayati 2018; Rose-Redwood et al. 2010). Geographical features play a prominent role in naming, with many villages deriving their names from distinctive natural elements such as plants, trees, estuaries, and water springs (Perono Cacciafoco & Cavallaro 2023). For instance, names like *Drien Rampak*, *Beureugang*, and *Pulo Ie* are deeply rooted in the presence of iconic trees or water sources, symbolizing the community's connection to nature and its reliance on local resources. This dependence not only illustrates people's awareness of the environment and highlights linguistic unity in which nature-based descriptive vocabulary transcends dialectal differences. However, subtle linguistic differences in the way these natural elements are described may indicate the existence of micro-regional variations in regional languages, leaving room for further investigation.

Furthermore, geographical location serves as another significant naming factor, with villages like *Cot Darat* and *Pasi Aceh Tunong* deriving their names from specific topographic features or land orientations (Helleland 2012). These names not only describe the physical characteristics of the villages but also highlight the role of geography in shaping settlement patterns and livelihoods. However, some examples show differences where names deviate from descriptive conventions, possibly due to historical or cultural influences, indicating that not all naming patterns are practical.

Heritage structures and landmark events also contribute to the naming process, providing a glimpse into the historical significance of certain villages (Helleland 2002). *Mesjid Tuha* and *Mesjid Baro*, for example, are named after the region's oldest and newest mosques,

respectively, emphasizing the lasting religious traditions and community identity associated with these landmarks. Linguistically, the preservation of traditional terms such as *Tuha* (old) indicates the community's dedication to maintaining a historical lexicon in everyday language, illustrating the convergence between historical narrative and linguistic continuity.

Ancestral origins play a crucial role in shaping village names, with settlements like *Suak Ribee*, *Purwodadi*, and *Purworejo* reflecting the cultural heritage and migration history of their founding settlers (Coates 2013). These names serve as a tribute to the ancestral roots of the communities and preserve the memories and traditions of past generations. The use of Javanese terms, for example, indicates cultural convergence due to historical migration, which is linguistically reflected in the integration of foreign names into local dialects.

Moreover, local folklore and historical incidents contribute to the narrative surrounding village names, adding layers of meaning and intrigue to the toponymic landscape (Kövecses 2006; Onchoke 2021). Villages like Krak Tampai and Suak Puntong derive their names through a naming process greatly influenced by legendary events or myths, highlighting the role of storytelling in shaping community identity and folklore transmission. A deeper linguistic analysis reveals how metaphorical and symbolic naming conventions create unique identifiers that distinguish these villages from their counterparts.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate the complex relationship between language, culture and geography in the naming of villages. By exploring the etymology and toponymy of place names, this research provides valuable insights into the historical, cultural, and environmental factors that shape community identity and connection to the land. Across these naming patterns, linguistic trends indicate convergence and divergence in the region. Certain morphological elements, such as the use of prefixes or suffixes commonly used in Acehnese and Indonesian, indicate the existence of the same linguistic framework. However, subtle phonetic and lexical variations reflect local dialectical diversity, indicating a complex linguistic landscape that combines unity and individuality. These findings not only contribute to the existing toponymy literature but also serve as a rich source of information on the history and heritage of Aceh, enriching our understanding of the region's cultural landscape.

6 Conclusion

This research provides valuable insights into the patterns and factors influencing village names. The findings revealed that geographical features dominated the naming process, with 13 villages named after natural elements such as trees and ponds. Other patterns that followed were geographical location, heritage structures, ancestral origins, landmark events or historical incidents, and local folklore. These six patterns represent the rich cultural heritage and strong connections to their land. This research provides valuable information for preserving and acclaiming the unique heritage of these communities for future generations and appreciating the beauty and significance of the west coast of Aceh.

One limitation of this study is its focus on a specific geographic area, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different cultural and environmental contexts. Future research could expand the scope to include a more diverse range of locations, providing a broader understanding of toponymic patterns. In addition, incorporating perspectives from local communities and indigenous knowledge holders could enrich the analysis, offering deeper insights into the cultural significance of place names.

By exploring toponymy in West Aceh and Nagan Raya, this research not only provides a basis for further study of toponymy but also draws attention to the broader meaning of place names as repositories of history, culture and identity. This is a reminder of the need to safeguard this cultural treasure and ensure that the heritage of this community is preserved for future generations.

Acknowledgment

We express our deepest gratitude to *Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian pada Masyarakat* (LPPM), or Institute for Research and Community Services, Universitas Syiah Kuala, for financially supporting this research (grant number 71/UN11.2.1/PT.01.03/PNBP/2023). This valuable support has significantly contributed to the success of this research.

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In SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics [online]. 2025, vol. 22, no. 1 [cit. 2025-06-30]. Available on web page <http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTL58/06.pdf>. ISSN 1336-782X