

Reconstructing Meaning Across Cultures: The Kazakh and English *Kutadgu Bilig* in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract—This study offers a comparative examination of the Kazakh and English translations of *Kutadgu Bilig*, an eleventh-century didactic poem composed by the Turkic scholar Yusuf Balasaguni. Grounded in Descriptive Translation Studies and current frameworks of cultural translation, the research approaches both translations as autonomous interpretive texts shaped by the norms and expectations of their respective target cultures, rather than measuring them against the medieval source. The analysis centers on core philosophical and ethical concepts – justice, fortune, intellect, the ultimate purpose of human life, law and custom (*törü*), modesty as a guardian of personhood (*uyat*), and active virtue (*edgülük*) – alongside Qur'anic allusions and culturally specific idiomatic expressions. The results reveal that the English translation tends toward the universalization of philosophical content and the segmentation of unified Turkic-Islamic concepts into clusters of narrower, register-specific terms, situating the work within an ethical framework accessible to a global readership. The Kazakh translation, by contrast, preserves these concepts as unified conceptual nodes and sustains religious depth and culturally embedded meaning, maintaining the text's connection to the Turkic-Islamic intellectual heritage. The study concludes that translation constitutes an act of cultural interpretation rather than mere linguistic transference, fundamentally reshaping the philosophical and ideological dimensions of classical works.

Index Terms—*Kutadgu Bilig*, Robert Dankoff, Askar Yegeubayev, meaning reconstruction, Turkic literary tradition

I. INTRODUCTION

Kutadgu Bilig, composed in the eleventh century by the Turkic poet and thinker Yusuf Balasaguni, represents one of the most significant works in the intellectual heritage of the Turkic world. Weaving together ethical reflection, political thought, and poetic form, the text elaborates a comprehensive vision of justice, wisdom, moderation, and moral responsibility that exerted considerable influence on early Turkic conceptions of governance and societal order. The philosophical density and cultural specificity of the work, however, render its transmission into other languages an inherently complex undertaking, one that inevitably involves choices about how meaning, values, and cultural identity

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are represented across linguistic boundaries.

The translation history of *Kutadgu Bilig* reflects the diversity of contexts in which the text has been received and reinterpreted across different scholarly and cultural traditions. The Kazakh translation by Askar Yegeubayev represents a culturally motivated effort to restore the medieval text to contemporary Kazakh literary consciousness and to affirm its place within the living intellectual tradition of the Turkic-speaking world. Robert Dankoff's English translation, by contrast, prioritizes scholarly accessibility and interpretive transparency for an international academic audience. These divergent translation objectives inevitably produce distinct textual outcomes, yet no systematic comparative study has thus far examined the nature and implications of these differences.

Existing scholarship on *Kutadgu Bilig* has largely concentrated on questions of philology, historical context, and philosophical content, leaving underexplored the ways in which the translation process reshapes the text's conceptual architecture and cultural meanings. The reformulation of philosophical categories, the handling of Qur'anic allusions, and the adaptation of culturally specific expressions across linguistic boundaries have not yet received adequate scholarly attention.

This study addresses the identified gap by examining how culturally embedded meanings in *Kutadgu Bilig* are reconstructed in the Kazakh and English translations from a comparative perspective. Through the analysis of selected textual examples, it explores the interpretation of philosophical concepts, ethical terminology, religious references, metaphorical expressions, and culture-specific lexical units across two linguistic and cultural contexts. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic equivalence, the study investigates how translation functions as a process of cultural interpretation and meaning reconstruction. The findings contribute to comparative literature, intercultural communication, and translation studies by providing deeper insights into the cross-cultural reinterpretation of classical literary heritage.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The past several decades have seen a fundamental shift in translation studies, moving away from source-text equivalence toward a broader concern with the cultural and ideological conditions governing translated works. A pivotal contribution to this reorientation was made by Toury (1995), whose work in Descriptive Translation Studies redirected scholarly attention toward translations as norm-governed products of target cultures rather than secondary approximations of an original. This perspective was complemented by Even-Zohar's (1990) polysystem theory, which situates literary translation within a dynamic network of interacting cultural subsystems, where translated texts may assume central or marginal positions contingent upon prevailing historical and cultural circumstances. Within this framework, translation is reconceived not as derivative reproduction but as active literary repositioning within a receiving system.

The cultural turn in translation studies, advanced by Bassnett (2014) and further elaborated by Snell-Hornby (2006), broadened this orientation by drawing attention to the embeddedness of translation within structures of power, ideology, and literary convention. Translation thereby came to be understood as an interpretive practice shaped by cultural and historical forces rather than a purely linguistic procedure. Hermans (1999) reinforced this view, arguing that translated texts function as active participants in the consolidation or transformation of literary norms, exercising agency in the formation of interpretive paradigms within receiving cultures.

Building on these foundations, translation has increasingly been theorized as a form of rewriting. Lefevere (1992) contended that translations are conditioned by patronage systems, dominant poetics, and ideological frameworks, actively participating in processes of canon formation. Venuti (1995, 2012) extended this argument by demonstrating how the opposing strategies of domestication and foreignization encode asymmetrical cultural relations and divergent assumptions about readership. Baker (2006) further enriched this perspective by conceptualizing translation as narrative construction, wherein translators actively configure interpretive frameworks rather than passively conveying pre-existing meaning. These theoretical orientations carry particular weight in the analysis of pre-modern philosophical and religious texts, where lexical decisions may substantially alter theological and epistemological registers.

From a systemic standpoint, recurring translational patterns may be understood through Chesterman's (1997) notion of "translation memes" – culturally embedded and reproducible strategies of meaning transfer that circulate within and across translation traditions. This framing suggests that translation is shaped not only by normative constraints but also by transmissible models of practice that condition how concepts are reformulated across languages. Rather than assessing translations against criteria of correctness or formal equivalence, the present study adopts a functional orientation consistent with House (2015), attending to how meaning operates within the target context and how communicative functions are reconfigured in the process.

Alongside these theoretical developments, scholarship on medieval intellectual history has consistently underscored the centrality of translation as a vehicle of civilizational exchange. Research by Burnett (2009), Gutas (1998), and Hasse (2016) on the Arabic–Latin translation movement establishes that medieval translation functioned as conceptual transformation rather than mere linguistic transfer, enabling cross-cultural transmission and reinterpretation of philosophical traditions. Taylor (2012) similarly highlights translation's formative role in shaping the conceptual vocabulary of medieval Islamic philosophy, where meaning was regularly rearticulated across linguistic and intellectual boundaries. Studies by Hodgson (1974), Nasr (2006), and Rahman (1982) further illuminate the integrative relationship

between theology, ethics, and political philosophy in classical Muslim thought, revealing the semantic richness embedded within key ethical categories.

Tymoczko (2007) contributes an important dimension to these discussions by foregrounding translation as a site of cultural positioning and identity construction, particularly in contexts marked by historical power asymmetries. Her perspective is especially relevant to the analysis of how translations of classical texts may serve as instruments of intellectual continuity or cultural reaffirmation. Methodologically, the comparative dimension of the present study draws on the approach advocated by Pym (2010), who argues for the value of examining multiple translations to identify systematic divergences in meaning production across cultural systems. For a comprehensive overview of contemporary translation paradigms, see also Munday (2016).

Notwithstanding the extensive body of research on medieval translation movements and contemporary translation theory, the translational recontextualization of classical Turkic didactic literature – and of *Kutadgu Bilig* in particular – has attracted comparatively limited scholarly inquiry. Existing philological studies have tended to privilege manuscript traditions, linguistic features, and historical commentary, while systematic comparative analyses of modern translations remain scarce. The question of how distinct linguistic environments reshape the philosophical and theological architecture of the text has yet to be adequately addressed.

The present study responds to this gap by situating the Kazakh and English translations of *Kutadgu Bilig* within contemporary debates on translation ideology, literary system dynamics, and cultural mediation. Drawing on Descriptive Translation Studies, polysystem theory, and scholarship on medieval intellectual transmission, the research approaches translation as a process of epistemological and cultural repositioning. Rather than treating the target texts as derivative approximations of a stable original, the study conceptualizes them as distinct interpretive constructions embedded within different semiotic and intellectual horizons, through which the philosophical and ethical dimensions of a classical Turkic text are reshaped in accordance with the normative structures and cultural expectations of the receiving culture.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. Research Design

Against this broader historical and theoretical background, the present study conducts a focused comparative analysis of two modern translations of *Kutadgu Bilig*. If medieval translation movements reveal that cross-cultural transfer necessarily entails conceptual restructuring, it follows that contemporary translations may similarly be expected to embody distinct epistemological orientations. The Kazakh and English versions of the text offer a particularly productive basis for such inquiry, given that they emerge from markedly different linguistic, literary, and intellectual traditions.

To identify recurring divergences in semantic density, cultural marking, and theological explicitness, the study employs a qualitative comparative methodology grounded in Descriptive Translation Studies. The analytical framework is further shaped by selected principles drawn from polysystem theory and culturally oriented approaches to translation. Rather than measuring the target texts against the medieval source in terms of fidelity, the study treats both versions as culturally embedded interpretive constructions in their own right. This perspective enables a systematic investigation of how core ethical concepts, Qur'anic resonances, and idiomatic expressions are reconstituted within different semiotic and cultural environments.

B. Corpus and Units of Analysis

The corpus consists of selected parallel passages from the Kazakh and English translations of *Kutadgu Bilig*. The passages were selected according to their conceptual, cultural, and philosophical significance rather than their position within the narrative structure.

The units of analysis include:

- core philosophical and ethical concepts, including justice, fortune, intellect, the ultimate purpose of human life, law and custom (*törü*), moral conscience and modesty (*uyat*), and active virtue (*edgülük*);
- Qur'anic allusions and religiously marked expressions;
- culture-specific lexical items and metaphorical expressions.

The analysis focuses on semantically and culturally significant elements that illustrate how meaning is reconstructed across the two translations. Rather than examining formal linguistic equivalence or syntactic correspondences, the study investigates how these philosophical concepts, ethical values, and culturally embedded expressions are interpreted, adapted, and represented within different linguistic and cultural contexts.

Although Yegeubayev's Kazakh translation preserves the poetic form of the original text, Dankoff's English version presents the work in prose. This formal distinction is acknowledged but is not central to the present analysis, which concentrates on the reconstruction of meaning and the cross-cultural representation of the source text rather than on its poetic structure.

C. Analytical Procedures

The study adopts a qualitative comparative approach integrating lexical-semantic, cultural, and intertextual methods of analysis. Central focus is placed on conceptual shifts within the two translations, including tendencies toward abstraction, specification, and semantic rationalization. Alongside this, the analysis attends to the ways in which culturally embedded meanings are either retained, neutralized, or recontextualized within distinct interpretive frameworks.

The discussion draws on selected textual fragments treated as representative illustrations of broader translational tendencies. Rather than pursuing comprehensive textual coverage, the study aims to uncover recurring patterns of semantic and cultural transformation across the two target versions.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Conceptual Translation of Philosophical Categories

The first concept examined here is *törü*, rendered by Dankoff (1983) descriptively as *law* within the compound formula “Justice and law are the pillars of heaven: if the law decayed, heaven would not stand up; and if there were no just princes alive, God would destroy the seven-tiered earth” (p. 153), and by Yegeubayev (2007) as *әділ төрелік* in «Көк тірегі – тура, әділ төрелік, Тірек тайса – шайқалғаны төбенің, Болмаса бек тірлікте адал сыйласар, Жеті қабат жерді Алла қыратар» (p. 312) (English gloss by authors: “The pillar of heaven is true, just governance; if this pillar wavers, the celestial dome will tilt. And if there are no honest [rulers] in life who respect one another, Allah will destroy the seven-layered earth”). In English, *Justice* and *law* are presented as two distinct, though cooperating, pillars – a division consistent with the Western philosophical separation of ethical principle from institutional norm. The Kazakh *әділ төрелік*, by contrast, fuses both into a single composite formula in which justice and law are not two supports but one indivisible concept, reflecting the Turkic understanding of *törü* as an attribute inseparable from the ruler's own righteousness rather than an autonomous institution standing apart from him. From the perspective of Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury, 1995), the English translation reflects a norm of conceptual segmentation drawn from Western political thought, whereas the Kazakh rendering preserves the original unity of *әділдік* (justice) and *төрелік* (judgment/adjudication) as a single, indivisible ground of legitimate rule. In Venuti's terms, this is domestication through philosophical categorization: the Turkic concept is reshaped into a binary familiar to the Western reader, while the Kazakh version, in Tymoczko's terms, retains the cultural location of the source by keeping law and justice ontologically fused.

A comparable narrowing occurs in the rendering of *ұят*, translated in English through a cluster of separate terms – *modest*, *shame*, *honor*, *self-respect* – in the passage “The modest man is the choicest of mankind... and with modesty he shuts the door to shame... his face is bright with the water of honor, and his eyes sparkle with the water of self-respect” (Dankoff, 1983, p. 112), corresponding to the Kazakh «Ұяты бар, көзі де тоқ ер керек... Кісілікті ұят сақтап қалады, Ұяты бар кісі – адамның адамы» (Yegeubayev, 2007, p. 222) (English gloss by authors: “A man is needed who possesses ұят [shame/modesty] and a contented, undemanding gaze... Ұят safeguards кісілік [personhood, human dignity]; a man who possesses ұят is a true man among men”). Where English distributes the concept across four lexemes belonging to distinct ethical registers – character trait, emotion, social status, and psychological state – Kazakh compresses them into a single terminological core, *ұят*, which functions simultaneously as cause, attribute, and precondition of full personhood (*кісілік*). The pivotal line «Кісілікті ұят сақтап қалады» establishes a causal chain – *ұят* safeguards *кісілік*, which in turn constitutes *адам* (the complete human being) – a logical sequence the English version replaces with a descriptive enumeration of modesty's effects rather than reproducing its underlying causal architecture. In Toury's terms, the English translation follows a norm of lexical fragmentation, splitting a unified ethical concept into functionally specialized terms of the target moral vocabulary; in Venuti's terms, this constitutes domestication through categorical segmentation, distributing a single Turkic ethical category across several non-equivalent English concepts.

The third concept, *ізгілік* (the modern Kazakh reflex of the Old Turkic *edgü/edgülük* ('goodness, virtue')) is rendered in English through five separate forms of a single root within one short passage – “wealth is the guide to every good and the cure for every ill... you may well acquire merit and goodness... the good things of the world... every good deed... why do you renounce these goods” (Dankoff, 1983, pp. 169–170) – against the Kazakh «Мал-дүние жол басы ізгіліктің, Мал-дүние дауасы күллі дерттің... Ізгілік жоқ, қайран жоқ қолдан келер! » (Yegeubayev, 2007, pp. 347–348) (English gloss by authors: “Wealth is the source of every good deed, wealth is the cure for every ailment... Without *ізгілік* [goodness/virtue], nothing worthwhile can be accomplished by hand!”). In Kazakh, *ізгілік* remains a single, terminologically consistent concept throughout. It denotes a virtue realized through action and conditioned by material prosperity rather than an abstract ethical value, and is grammatically conceptualized as a resource that can be present or absent (*ізгілік жоқ* ‘*ізгілік* is lacking’). English, lacking a single word capable of covering abstract virtue, concrete good deed, and general benefit at once, must reassign a new form of *good* at each turn, producing an appearance of lexical richness that in fact signals the absence of one stable conceptual equivalent. Following Lefevere, this is a case of rewriting in which a unified ethical category dissolves into a broader, less determinate field of English moral vocabulary; in Even-Zohar's polysystem terms, *ізгілік* occupies a central, terminologically fixed position within

the Kazakh system, recurring elsewhere in the text in the same form, while its English counterpart is re-dispersed contextually each time it appears, never consolidating into a stable term.

Taken together, these three examples reveal two different translational orientations. The English version prioritizes accessibility and conceptual universality for an international readership, dissolving single, multivalent Turkic-Islamic philosophical categories into either broader universalizing abstractions or clusters of specialized, register-bound terms. The Kazakh translation, by contrast, preserves these categories as unified conceptual nodes – law fused with justice, shame fused with personhood, virtue fused with material agency – sustaining the multilayered, culturally embedded epistemology of the source text. In this sense, translation functions not simply as linguistic transfer but as an interpretative act shaped by the cultural expectations and ideological frameworks of the receiving environment.

B. *Qur'anic Allusions and Theological Semantics in Translation*

This passage, spoken by Ögdülmish in praise of the king, contains a further Qur'anic-inflected allusion embedded within a didactic proverb structure. The English translation renders it as: “To whomever God grants His favor as his portion, that one accomplishes his desire and achieves good repute... By God's grace a man grows great, by God's favor he achieves his goal and his affairs prosper” (Dankoff, 1983, p. 98). The Kazakh original reads: «Алла кімге ризық, ниет қылады, Сол тілекке жетіп, аты шығады... Ұлылығың – бұйрығы бір Алланың» (Yegeubayev, 2007, p. 193) (English gloss by authors: “To whomever Allah grants rizyq [divinely apportioned sustenance/fortune] and niyet [intention/purpose], that one reaches his wish and his name becomes renowned... Your greatness is the command of the One Allah alone”).

The theological core of this passage rests on two Islamic conceptual terms that the English translation renders through generalized vocabulary. The word *ризық* (*rizyq*, from Arabic *rizq*) is a specifically Islamic theological concept denoting the divinely predetermined portion of sustenance, fortune, and provision allotted to each individual by God – not merely material wealth in a secular sense, but a fixed, providentially assigned share of worldly good that no human effort can increase or diminish beyond what is decreed. Dankoff renders this as *favor* and later as *grace*, terms drawn from a more general Christian-inflected theological vocabulary of divine benevolence. While *favor* captures the sense of unmerited divine gift, it loses the specifically deterministic, apportionment-based logic of *rizyq* – the idea that each person's share is fixed in advance, rather than granted variably according to divine pleasure in the moment. Based on Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury, 1995), this substitution reflects a target-oriented norm that favors theologically neutral, broadly Christian-compatible vocabulary (*favor*, *grace*) over the precise Islamic jurisprudential-theological terminology of the source.

The second term, *ниет* (*niet*, from Arabic *niyyah*, intention), is likewise theologically loaded in Islamic ethical thought, where the validity and moral worth of any act depend foundationally on the sincerity and rightness of one's *niyyah* – a concept famously central to Islamic legal and spiritual doctrine (as in the hadith “Actions are judged by intentions”). In the Kazakh text, God grants both *rizyq* and *niet* together, suggesting that not only material fortune but the very capacity for rightly-oriented intention is itself a divine gift. This pairing is entirely absent from the English rendering, where *favor* alone stands in for both concepts, collapsing a theologically precise dyad (providential portion + rightly-guided intention) into a single generalized notion of divine goodwill.

The line «Ұлылығың – бұйрығы бір Алланың» (“your greatness is the command of the one Allah”) – addressed to the king – makes the theological hierarchy explicit: royal greatness is not autonomous merit but a direct execution of divine decree. Although Dankoff's English text conveys a structurally similar idea (“By God's grace a man grows great”), the Kazakh formulation's use of *бұйрық* (command, decree) frames greatness as the direct enactment of an authoritative divine order, closer to the vocabulary of *qadar* (predestination) than to *grace*, which implies a gentler, more elective divine favor.

The framing device is also worth noting: both versions present the statement as an inherited proverb (“an experienced graybeard quoted the following Turkish proverb” / «Көпті көрген ақсақалды қария, Айтқан мақал түркілерге жария»), which situates the theological claim within a communal, orally transmitted wisdom tradition rather than as direct authorial assertion. This framing is preserved equivalently across both translations and does not show significant divergence – the difference lies specifically in the lexical rendering of the theological content itself, not in its narrative packaging.

In Venuti's terms, the English translation again performs domestication through cultural neutralization: *favor* and *grace* are lexical choices legible to a broad, denominationally unmarked Western readership, but they abstract away from the specifically Islamic doctrinal architecture of *rizq* and *niyyah* that structures the Kazakh text's theological logic. In Tymoczko's terms, the Kazakh rendering preserves the cultural and doctrinal location of the original – retaining the precise conceptual vocabulary through which Turkic-Islamic thought articulates the relationship between divine decree, human intention, and worldly outcome – while the English version relocates the same idea into a more universally accessible, doctrinally unmarked register of providential benevolence.

The divergence is not one of propositional content (both texts affirm that greatness and success come from God) but of *theological precision*: the Kazakh text names the specific mechanisms (apportioned *rizyq*, rightly-oriented *niet*, binding divine command) through which this dependency operates, while the English text expresses the same dependency through softer, less doctrinally anchored vocabulary of *favor* and *grace*.

The following fragment of royal counsel in *Kutadgu Bilig* concerning the conduct of warfare and the treatment of fellow believers. The English translation renders it as: “Do not march against another Muslim, O king. His adversary is God alone. Muslims are brothers to one another: do not quarrel with your brother, keep on good terms with him always” (Dankoff, 1983, p. 218). The Kazakh original states: «Мұсылманға қол тигізбе, жақындап, Хақтың өзі қорғайды оны, мақұлдап. Мұсылманға – мұсылман, біл, туысқан, Туысқанмен жұлыспай, жөн, ұғысқан» (Yegeubayev, 2007, p. 445) (English gloss by authors: “Do not lay a hand upon a Muslim, drawing near [to attack]; al-Ḥaqq [God, the Truth] Himself protects and sanctions him. Know that to a Muslim, a Muslim is a kinsman; it is right to be in mutual understanding with one's kinsman, without tearing at [quarreling with] him”).

The theological framing of divine protection differs meaningfully between the two versions. The English “His adversary is God alone” casts God as the opposing party confronting anyone who would harm a Muslim – a relatively abstract, juridical formulation emphasizing the threat awaiting the aggressor. The Kazakh «Хақтың өзі қорғайды оны, мақұлдап» instead employs «Хақ» (al-Ḥaqq, “the Truth” – one of the ninety-nine names of Allah, carrying strong theological connotations of absolute justice and truth) and frames the relationship as one of active divine protection and sanction («қорғайды» – protects; «мақұлдап» – approving, sanctioning), rather than adversarial opposition. This shifts the theological emphasis from God-as-opponent-to-the-wrongdoer toward God-as-guardian-of-the-protected – a distribution of agency that foregrounds the sanctioned inviolability of the Muslim under threat rather than the punishment awaiting his attacker.

The core fraternal formula is rendered through «Мұсылманға – мұсылман, біл, туысқан» (“know that to a Muslim, a Muslim is *туысқан*”). The Kazakh translator's choice of *туысқан* (kinsman, blood relative) rather than a term meaning *brother* in a purely fraternal-religious sense intensifies the familial closeness implied by the English *brothers* into an idiom of literal kinship. This lexical choice draws on the broader Turkic cultural framework in which «*туыс*»/«*туысқан*» relations carry specific obligations of mutual defense, loyalty, and non-aggression – obligations that extend beyond voluntary religious solidarity into something closer to structural, blood-bond duty.

The concluding line reinforces this idiomatic embedding: «Туысқанмен жұлыспай, жөн, ұғысқан» (“it is right to be in mutual understanding with one's kinsman, without tearing at him”). The verb *жұлысу* (to tear at one another, to grapple or scuffle) is a vivid, physically concrete idiom for conflict, considerably more visceral than the English *do not quarrel*, which remains in a more abstract register of verbal or relational disagreement. *Ұғысқан* (mutual understanding, being in accord) similarly frames the desired outcome not merely as an absence of conflict (*keep on good terms*, as in the English) but as an achieved state of shared comprehension between kin.

Based on Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury, 1995), the English translation reflects a norm favoring accessible, doctrinally unmarked phrasing: *brothers*, *quarrel*, and *adversary* are terms readily intelligible within a general Western ethical-religious vocabulary, requiring no specific familiarity with Islamic theological or Turkic kinship idiom. The Kazakh rendering, by contrast, activates a denser network of culturally and theologically specific resources – the divine name *Хақ*, the kinship term *туысқан*, and the physically vivid idiom *жұлыспай* – each of which draws the passage more firmly into an Islamic-Turkic ethical and social framework rather than a universalized moral statement.

In Venuti's terms, the English strategy performs domestication through cultural neutralization, presenting the injunction against inter-Muslim violence as a generalizable ethical principle accessible to readers outside the Islamic tradition. In Tymoczko's terms, the Kazakh version preserves the cultural location of the original by rendering fraternal solidarity through the vocabulary of actual kinship obligation and by retaining a theologically specific divine epithet rather than a generic reference to God.

The divergence, then, lies not in propositional content – both texts affirm that Muslims must not harm one another and that God protects the wronged party – but in the degree to which the underlying Islamic-Turkic conceptual architecture (divine names, kinship-based social obligation, physically embodied idioms of conflict and concord) remains visible to the reader. The English reader receives a universal ethical injunction against internal strife; the Kazakh reader receives the same injunction embedded within a specifically Turkic-Islamic vocabulary of kinship, divine sanction, and bodily-idiomatic conflict.

C. Idiomatic Translation and the Transformation of Cultural Meaning

The idiom of *bread and salt* as a marker of hospitality and loyalty appears within the advice on cultivating friendship in *Kutadgu Bilig*. The English translation reads: “If you would have many who love you, be open-handed with bread and salt and cheerful in manner” (Dankoff, 1983, p. 177). The expression *bread and salt* is retained as a literal calque of the source image. Although the phrase is lexically transparent – the association between food-sharing and generosity is readily understandable – it is not an established idiom in contemporary English. Consequently, the causal implication that hospitality fosters loyal friendship is conveyed primarily through the surrounding conditional clause, *if you would have many who love you*, rather than through the expression itself. In other words, the ethical force of the image derives largely from its syntactic context rather than from the phrase alone.

The Kazakh rendering embeds the same image within a more comprehensive representation of the reciprocal obligations of friendship: «Ақжүректі туыс, жолдас, бауыр тұт, Сен соларға – болмас қайғы, ауырлық. Дос, туыс сол қуанышта қуанар, Қайғы келсе, қасыңда боп уатар. Сүйсін десең, көп достарың өзіңді, Тұз-нан ұсын, Жарқын ұста жөзіңді» (Yegeubayev, 2007, pp. 363–364) (English gloss by authors: “Hold the pure-hearted one as kinsman, companion, brother; with such people there will be no grief or hardship for you. A friend, a kinsman, rejoices

in your joy; if grief comes, he will remain beside you to offer comfort. If you wish your many friends to love you, offer tuz-nan [salt-bread, i.e., hospitality] and keep your face bright”). Here, *тұз-нан ұсын* (offer salt-bread) functions as a direct imperative embedded within a sequence of reciprocal duties – shared joy, shared sorrow, and mutual consolation. As a result, offering bread and salt functions less as advice on how to gain affection than as the expected concluding element of an already familiar catalogue of obligations that define friendship. This interpretation is consistent with the broader conventional use of the expression in Kazakh as a fixed collocation denoting hospitality. A Kazakh reader is therefore likely to recognize «нан-тұз»/«тұз-нан» immediately as a conventional shorthand for the hospitality–loyalty relationship, whereas *bread and salt* cannot be assumed to carry the same idiomatic resonance for an English-speaking audience.

One point of uncertainty should nevertheless be acknowledged. In this passage, the expression appears as *тұз-нан* rather than the more frequently cited form *нан-тұз*. Whether this reflects a meaningful lexical variant, a metrical requirement of the poetic line, or simply permissible variation in word order cannot be established with confidence on the basis of a single example. Verification against a Kazakh phraseological dictionary or a representative corpus would be required before any broader conclusions could be drawn. Accordingly, this issue is set aside and is not treated as evidence for the flexibility of the idiom.

The more defensible contrast lies elsewhere. In Dankoff's translation, the bread-and-salt image remains intelligible but depends on its surrounding conditional construction to explain why hospitality serves as the foundation of loyal friendship. In Yegeubayev's rendering, by contrast, the same image appears as one imperative among several within a sequence of obligations that readers are expected to recognize as constitutive of enduring friendship, and therefore requires no comparable interpretive support. This observation is broadly consistent with Toury's view that translators working under different target-system norms make different decisions regarding the degree of interpretive scaffolding required for figurative language. At the same time, the observed difference may reflect genre as much as translation norms, since the Kazakh passage is embedded within a more extensive descriptive sequence. Consequently, the comparison does not warrant broader claims about the relative idiomatic vitality of *bread and salt* and *нан-тұз* in English and Kazakh, but rather demonstrates how different translational contexts influence the degree to which a culturally marked image requires explicit interpretive framing.

The following passage, exhorting the ruler to righteous conduct in *Kutadgu Bilig*, addresses him through a bodily-political image: “Commit no wrong, you whose hand is long, but only good in word and deed; for the sovereignty you now enjoy can turn its back on you, but virtue never turns its back” (Dankoff, 1983, p. 205). In the English translation, “*you whose hand is long*” is syntactically embedded as a relative clause modifying the addressee. Its primary function is identificatory: the image contributes a descriptive attribute within a broader prohibition but does not acquire independent rhetorical prominence within the sentence.

Yegeubayev renders the same address as: «*Ай, қолы ұзын, жамандыққа бармағын*» (Yegeubayev, 2007, p. 420) (English gloss by authors: “O you of the long hand [i.e. far-reaching power], do not turn to wrongdoing”). The structural difference extends beyond stylistic preference. Although *қолы ұзын* is formally a possessive construction (literally, *his hand is long*), Kazakh permits third-person possessive forms to function as vocative epithets without additional morphological marking, a pattern attested in both didactic and epic discourse (cf. comparable epithet constructions in oral formulaic verse). Equally significant is the particle *Ай*, which separates the epithet from the subsequent prohibition *жамандыққа бармағын*, creating a distinct syntactic pause. No comparable separation is present in the English translation, where the descriptive phrase remains fully integrated into the main clause.

The difference is more convincingly explained by the idiomatic status of the expression in the respective linguistic traditions than by individual translator preference. In Kazakh, *қолы ұзын* belongs to a conventional repertoire of political and ethical phraseology denoting the reach of authority or influence beyond one's immediate presence. Because the expression is already culturally recognizable, it can function independently as a vocative epithet, invoking the ruler through a familiar symbolic attribute without requiring additional explanation. By comparison, *long hand* has no corresponding idiomatic status in English. It remains semantically transparent, yet functions as a non-conventional figurative expression whose intended meaning must be inferred from the surrounding context rather than retrieved as an established phraseological unit.

This contrast should not, however, be interpreted as evidence of a fundamental distinction between a supposedly “descriptive” English mode of address and an inherently “performative” Kazakh one. English is fully capable of comparable vocative constructions, particularly in archaic or elevated literary registers (e.g., “*O thou of...*”). Their absence in Dankoff's translation therefore reflects a translational decision rather than a structural limitation of the language itself. The comparison instead indicates that Yegeubayev's rendering preserves a greater degree of immediacy in addressing the ruler, whether through deliberate stylistic choice or through the availability of an established Kazakh idiom, whereas Dankoff's version privileges syntactic integration and semantic explicitness. From this perspective, the passage illustrates a distinction central to Toury's and Venuti's discussions of translation norms: fidelity to the lexical content of a metaphor does not necessarily entail fidelity to its pragmatic or rhetorical function, and the two dimensions may diverge even in translations that remain otherwise highly accurate.

The passage contrasting contentment and greed through ocular imagery provides another instructive example. The English translation reads: “Hear the words of a full-eyed man – ‘Fullness of eye is the head of wealth’: Even if a greedy-

eyed man gained the entire world, he still could not be called rich” (Dankoff, 1983, p. 215). The expressions *full-eyed* and *greedy-eyed* preserve the source metaphor through a largely literal calque, presenting the eye as the locus of desire—or, conversely, of freedom from desire. Neither expression, however, constitutes an established idiom in English. As a result, the translation relies on the accompanying aphorism, “*Fullness of eye is the head of wealth*”, to explicate the metaphor rather than allowing the figurative expressions to convey their evaluative meaning independently.

Yegeubayev's (2007) rendering reads: «Тыңда, көзі тоқ кісі не деді екен, Көз тоқтығы – байлық көзі, береке: Қолға алса да, сұқ көз түгел жаһанды, Бай деме оны!» (p. 439) (English gloss by authors: “Hear what the man of the 'full eye' [content, undesiring] said: the fullness of the eye is the source of wealth and abundance— even if the 'piercing/covetous eye' [greedy, envious] were to seize the entire world, do not call him rich”). The expressions *көзі тоқ* (content or satisfied eye) and *сұқ көз* (covetous or envious eye) function as recognizable phraseological units in Kazakh. Their precise frequency or degree of conventionality would require confirmation through phraseological reference works or corpus evidence; nevertheless, they are sufficiently familiar that a Kazakh reader is unlikely to require the subsequent aphorism in order to recognize the evaluative contrast. Although the explanatory statement is likewise retained in the Kazakh version, its function differs from that of the English translation. Rather than establishing the meaning of the metaphor, it reinforces an opposition that is already encoded in the idiomatic expressions themselves.

Venuti's distinction between foreignizing and domesticating translation strategies offers a useful point of reference, although the present example resists a straightforward binary interpretation. Dankoff preserves the source imagery through literal calques, even though English lacks corresponding conventional idioms capable of carrying the same evaluative associations. Yegeubayev, by contrast, draws upon phraseological resources that are already available within the target language and therefore activates meanings familiar to the intended readership. At the same time, the English rendering should not be interpreted simply as a failure to domesticate. English possesses its own idiomatic expressions for contentment and greed that could have conveyed comparable evaluative meanings without reproducing the original metaphor so closely. The decision to retain *full-eyed* and *greedy-eyed*, supplemented by an explanatory aphorism, therefore appears to reflect a deliberate attempt to preserve both the figurative imagery and the aphoristic character of the source text rather than a lack of suitable expressive resources in English.

The comparison therefore points to a more limited conclusion. In this passage, the Kazakh idioms communicate their evaluative meanings independently, whereas the English rendering relies on the accompanying aphorism to guide interpretation. Whether this difference reflects broader contrasts between the idiomatic repertoires of English and Kazakh or merely the translator's strategy in this particular instance cannot be determined on the basis of a single example.

The scene depicting a dying man's final words to his brother in *Kutadgu Bilig* provides a particularly revealing example of how the approach of death is conceptualized through idiomatic expression. In the English translation, the speaker declares: “my path lies straight before me, death's vanguard has seized me and soon I shall depart” (Dankoff, 1983, p. 234). The expression *death's vanguard* sustains an extended military metaphor in which death advances like an army whose leading ranks have already overtaken the speaker. Although the image is rhetorically coherent, it does not function as a conventional English idiom. Its interpretation therefore depends on reconstructing the underlying military analogy rather than recognizing an established phraseological unit. Notably, English possesses several conventional idioms referring to imminent death, such as *at death's door* or *one foot in the grave*, yet Dankoff deliberately avoids substituting the source image with any of these established expressions. From the perspective of Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies, this choice appears to reflect a translational norm favouring the preservation of the source text's figurative organization over replacement with a target-language idiom of equivalent communicative function.

Yegeubayev adopts a markedly different solution by combining two independent idiomatic expressions within a single utterance: «Бауырым, – деді, – жолым, дәмім таусылды, Өлім бүріп, құшағына қаусырды!» (Yegeubayev, 2007, p. 476) (English gloss by authors: “‘Brother,’ he said, ‘my path, my dām [allotted life-span, divinely appointed portion] has run out; death has swooped down and gathered me into its embrace.’”). The expression *дәмім таусылды* (my dām has run out) derives from the Turkic-Islamic concept of *dām*, referring to the divinely allotted measure of a person's life and sustenance, and functions as a conventional euphemism for death. Rather than portraying death as an external force approaching the individual, the expression conceptualizes dying as the natural exhaustion of a predetermined life allotment. The accompanying phrase, *Өлім бүріп, құшағына қаусырды* (death swooped down and gathered [me] into its embrace), combines a predatory verb associated with the attack of a bird of prey or a forceful grasping movement with the unexpectedly gentle image of an embrace. The resulting personification presents death simultaneously as both aggressor and protector, producing a level of emotional complexity absent from the martial imagery employed in the English translation.

At the same time, the analysis should avoid stronger claims than the available evidence can support. Whether *dām* and the predator–embrace construction occupy a particularly central position within the Kazakh phraseological repertoire cannot be established without systematic evidence from phraseological dictionaries or corpus data. A more defensible observation, viewed through Even-Zohar's concept of repertoire, is that the translator draws upon two distinct idiomatic resources originating in different conceptual domains: one rooted in theological understandings of fate and allotted lifespan, the other in personified imagery of predation and embrace. Their combination within a single utterance represents a translation strategy qualitatively different from replacing the source metaphor with a single conventional

target-language equivalent.

Venuti's distinction between foreignization and domestication is likewise applicable only with appropriate qualification. Dankoff's translation is not foreignizing because it introduces culturally unfamiliar imagery; military metaphors for death are well established within English literary tradition. Rather, its foreignizing tendency lies in preserving the internal figurative logic of the source text instead of replacing it with a more conventional English idiom. Yegeubayev's rendering, conversely, should not be regarded as a straightforward example of domestication. Rather than reducing the source image to a single familiar expression, it expands the emotional and cultural resonance of the passage by integrating two complementary idioms whose semantic associations reinforce one another. In this respect, domestication operates not through simplification but through enrichment of the expressive repertoire available to the target reader.

Ultimately, both translations communicate the same propositional meaning: the speaker recognizes that death is imminent. Their divergence lies instead in the degree of cultural and emotional meaning condensed into that recognition. The English version develops a single extended metaphor whose significance must be inferred by the reader, whereas the Kazakh rendering compresses two culturally established idioms into a single farewell, allowing each to contribute its own semantic and affective associations to the representation of death.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examined how culturally embedded meanings are reconstructed in the Kazakh and English translations of *Kutadgu Bilig*, approaching both versions as culturally situated interpretive texts rather than as direct linguistic reproductions of the medieval original. Instead of assessing translational fidelity, the analysis focused on the ways philosophical concepts, ethical values, and culture-specific expressions are reinterpreted within different linguistic and cultural environments.

The findings reveal distinct translational orientations in the two versions. Yegeubayev's Kazakh translation preserves the ethical depth, poetic character, and Turkic-Islamic conceptual framework of the original, functioning as a form of cultural continuity that reconnects the medieval text with contemporary Kazakh literary tradition. In contrast, Dankoff's English translation prioritizes conceptual clarity and intercultural accessibility, frequently reformulating culturally specific concepts into more universal philosophical categories. While this strategy broadens international accessibility, it also reshapes certain theological, historical, and cultural dimensions of the source text.

These findings support the central assumptions of Descriptive Translation Studies by demonstrating that translation is shaped not only by linguistic equivalence but also by cultural norms, interpretive traditions, and the expectations of target audiences. The comparison further illustrates that different translations do not simply represent varying degrees of accuracy; rather, they construct distinct interpretive perspectives on the same literary work.

The study also contributes to comparative literature and intercultural communication by demonstrating how the comparative analysis of parallel translations can reveal recurring patterns of semantic reconstruction, conceptual adaptation, and cultural repositioning. In this respect, *Kutadgu Bilig* serves as a valuable case for understanding how classical literary heritage is continually reinterpreted across languages and cultures while preserving its enduring philosophical significance.

Although the analysis is limited to the Kazakh and English translations, the proposed analytical framework may be applied to other multilingual versions of *Kutadgu Bilig* and to comparable works of classical world literature. Future research may incorporate additional translations and investigate readers' reception of culturally reconstructed meanings in different educational and cultural contexts.

Overall, the study confirms that translation is not merely a means of transferring meaning but a dynamic process through which cultural memory, philosophical thought, and literary heritage are continuously reconstructed across historical periods, languages, and civilizations.

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