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The Perception of Bookish Religious Lexicon in Selected Poetry of Akmulla: Comprehensibility, Lexical Complexity, and Poetic Effect

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***Abstract*—This study examines how bookish religious vocabulary in Akmulla's poetry is perceived by contemporary Kazakh-speaking readers. The aim is to identify the relationship between text comprehensibility, lexical complexity, and poetic effect. The research materials were drawn from a corpus of 60 poetic stanzas, of which 10 were selected for experimental analysis, each containing one target lexical item. Data were collected through Google Forms, where participants evaluated stanzas containing Arabic-Persian-derived words. The results show that overall text comprehensibility remains relatively high despite lexical complexity. Although lexical difficulty is moderate, it does not significantly hinder understanding. At the same time, poetic effect scores are consistently high, indicating that readers are able to appreciate the aesthetic value of the text even when some lexical items are not fully understood. Correlation analysis reveals a weak relationship between comprehensibility and difficulty, and a slight positive relationship between difficulty and poetic effect. The A/B comparison results demonstrate that participants tend to prefer simplified variants in terms of clarity. However, the original bookish forms retain their aesthetic impact. These findings suggest that the perception of poetic texts operates on both cognitive and aesthetic levels. The study contributes to understanding the role of historical bookish vocabulary in modern reader perception and the mechanisms underlying poetic language processing.**

***Index Terms*—poetic text, lexical complexity, poetic effect, bookish religious lexicon, reader perception**

I. Introduction

The issue of poetic text perception is one of the important directions in contemporary linguistics and literary studies. In particular, the relationship between linguistic complexity in literary texts and its effect on the reader remains insufficiently explored. According to the traditional view, text comprehensibility is assumed to be directly related to linguistic simplicity. However, in poetry this relationship is not always straightforward, since meaning in literary texts is shaped not only at the lexical level but also through aesthetic, emotional, and cultural context (Kim, 2024).

Reader-oriented theories regard text comprehension not as passive reception but as an active cognitive process. From this perspective, meaning is not given in a ready-made form; rather, it emerges through the interaction between the reader and the text (Gürgil & Erdağı 2025; Momeni et al., 2026; Rosenblatt, 1978). Thus, even when readers do not fully know the meanings of individual words, they can still construct the general meaning of the text by relying on context and their

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linguistic experience. In this way, text comprehension depends not only on lexical factors but also on cognitive and interpretive mechanisms (Nursaid et al., 2025; Widayanti et al., 2025; Spiegel, 1998).

This issue is especially important in poetry, where the aesthetic function of language becomes dominant. In poetry, a word is not merely a carrier of information but also a means of producing emotional and artistic effect (Jakobson, 1960). Therefore, unclear or rarely used vocabulary may in some cases not weaken the impact of a text but rather intensify it. This demonstrates the specificity of poetic language and the multilayered nature of its perception.

In the context of Kazakh literature, this issue is particularly relevant (Abdrakhim, 2018; Iskakov, 2007; Fazylova, 2021; Zhurtbay, 2021). In the poetry of akyns and zhyraus, especially in nineteenth-century works, Arabic-Persian religious and Sufi vocabulary was widely used. This lexicon was closely connected with the spiritual and cultural worldview of the period, and poetry served not only an aesthetic but also a religious and educational function. Drawing on Qur'anic verses and Islamic teachings, poets guided their audiences toward faith, morality, and spiritual values (Däribaiuly, 2017).

At the same time, the Sufi and religious terms used in nineteenth-century poetry have undergone semantic changes over time and are not always fully understandable to modern readers (Abylkasov et al., 2025; Aubakirova & Zhumagul, 2025). This phenomenon creates additional difficulties in the perception of poetic texts. Sufi vocabulary in Kazakh poetry has not fully preserved its original meanings and has acquired new interpretations (Akhmetbekova, 2013; Mataeva et al., 2022).

Accordingly, the way modern readers perceive such texts, and how lexical complexity influences comprehensibility and poetic effect, becomes an important research issue. In particular, the question of whether obscure vocabulary weakens textual perception or preserves its aesthetic impact remains highly relevant.

The aim of this study is to identify the features of how bookish religious vocabulary in Akmulla's poetry is perceived by contemporary readers. The study analyzes the levels of text comprehensibility, lexical complexity, and poetic effect, and statistically examines the relationships among them. In addition, through an A/B comparison of the original and simplified versions, the study identifies readers' perceptual strategies.

The study addresses the following main research questions:

1. How does bookish religious vocabulary affect the overall comprehensibility of the text?
2. Does lexical complexity weaken poetic effect, or does it preserve it?
3. What choice do modern readers make between comprehensibility and aesthetic effect?

Thus, this study approaches poetic text perception by integrating its cognitive and aesthetic dimensions and provides new empirical data based on Kazakh literary material.

II. Method

A. Participants

Kazakh-speaking respondents voluntarily participated in the study. Data were collected online via Google Forms. At the beginning of the survey, participants provided demographic information, including age, gender, education, profession, and level of familiarity with Kazakh literature. The total sample consisted of approximately 79 respondents, as determined by the percentage distribution of responses. The diversity of participants in terms of social and educational background ensured the generalizability of the results.

B. Materials

The research materials consisted of poetic stanzas selected from the works of Akmulla. Although the full corpus included 60 stanzas, 10 were selected for experimental analysis. The selection was purposeful, prioritizing texts containing bookish religious vocabulary that could potentially cause difficulty for modern readers.

Each stanza contained one target lexical item. The analyzed words were: ghibratly, ghazab, ghaqaid, khalaf, ghadet, sirat, tamigh, shahbaz, ghaqyl, and yskhat. These words are of Arabic-Persian origin and are relatively rare in contemporary usage.

For each lexical item, two versions were presented:

A – the original bookish form,

B – a simplified modern equivalent.

This design allowed for identifying participants' preferences in terms of comprehensibility and poetic effect.

C. Procedure

The survey followed a consistent structure, with identical questions for each stanza. After reading each text, participants rated its comprehensibility using a 5-point Likert scale (1 – not understandable, 5 – fully understandable).

Next, participants evaluated the degree to which the target word hindered comprehension (on a 1–5 scale). They also rated the poetic effect of the word. Additionally, participants were asked to provide their own interpretation of the word's meaning.

At the end of the survey, an A/B comparison task was included, where participants selected which version was more understandable and which was more aesthetically effective.

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D. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using R software. The main variables included comprehensibility, lexical difficulty, and poetic effect.

For each variable, mean values and standard deviations (SD) were calculated. Frequency distributions and percentage values were also computed.

Mean values were compared across individual lexical items. The results of the A/B tasks were analyzed in percentage terms.

Relationships between variables were examined using Pearson correlation:

– comprehensibility vs. difficulty

– difficulty vs. effect

This analysis allowed for identifying the interrelations among the key variables.

III. Results

A. Overall Comprehensibility of the Texts

At the first stage of the study, participants' overall level of text comprehension was assessed quantitatively. This indicator was calculated based on the aggregated array of ratings for all stanzas (comp_all). The results showed that the average level of comprehensibility was relatively high, with a mean value of M = 3.65 and a standard deviation of SD = 1.29. Within the 5-point scale, this indicates that the texts were not perceived as completely difficult, but neither were they entirely easy; rather, they were understood at a moderately high level.

Table 1
Overall Comprehensibility

Variable	Mean	SD
Comprehensibility	3.6468	1.2888

These results suggest that the semantic structure and lexical composition of the texts were generally accessible to participants. However, the relatively high standard deviation (SD ≈ 1.29) indicates variability in responses. In other words, while some participants fully understood the texts, others experienced lower levels of comprehension. This variation may be attributed to differences in the perception of bookish religious vocabulary.

To examine the impact of individual lexical items on overall comprehension, mean ratings were calculated for each target word. The results are presented below.

Table 2
Comprehensibility by Lexical Item (Mean Values)

Word	Mean
ghibratly	3.8228
ghazab	3.8861
ghaqaid	3.5063
khalaf	3.5949
ghadet	3.8354
sirat	3.7089
tamigh	3.6329
shahbaz	3.5443
ghaqyl	3.5570
yskhat	3.3797

As shown in Table 2, the highest comprehensibility scores were observed for ghazab (M = 3.89), ghadet (M = 3.84), and ghibratly (M = 3.82). These results suggest that these words are relatively more familiar to participants or easier to interpret semantically. It is also possible that these lexical items are connected to modern Kazakh usage or have recognizable analogues, facilitating their comprehension.

In contrast, the lowest score was recorded for yskhat (M = 3.38), followed by ghaqaid (M = 3.51), shahbaz (M = 3.54), and ghaqyl (M = 3.56). These words may represent less familiar or more complex lexical items for participants. In particular, Arabic-Persian-derived terms are known to be more difficult to interpret without sufficient contextual support, making such results expected.

Nevertheless, it is important that all mean values fall within the range of 3.3–3.9. This indicates that the texts were not perceived as incomprehensible overall; rather, most participants were able to understand them to a certain extent. In other words, bookish religious vocabulary does not render the texts entirely inaccessible but may reduce the level of comprehension to some degree.

Furthermore, the results suggest that overall comprehension depends not only on individual lexical meanings but also on contextual factors. Even when participants did not know the exact meaning of certain words, they were able to infer the general meaning of the stanza intuitively. This reflects the cognitive nature of text perception, where meaning is constructed not only at the lexical level but also through the overall textual structure.

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Overall, the findings demonstrate that the studied poetic texts exhibit a moderately high level of comprehensibility and remain accessible to readers despite lexical complexity. While individual lexical items vary in their impact, they do not fundamentally prevent the understanding of the text as a whole.

B. Lexical Difficulty of Archaic and Bookish Words

At the next stage of the study, the perceived difficulty of individual lexical items was analyzed. This indicator was calculated based on the aggregated ratings of how much each word hindered text comprehension (diff_all). The overall results showed that the mean lexical difficulty was M = 2.71 with a standard deviation of SD = 1.32. On a 5-point scale, this indicates that the words were generally not highly difficult, but not entirely easy either, reflecting a below-average level of difficulty.

TABLE 3
OVERALL LEXICAL DIFFICULTY

Variable	Mean	SD
Lexical difficulty	2.7051	1.3227

The fact that the mean value is below 3 is a significant finding. It suggests that most participants were able to understand the words to some extent or relied on contextual cues for interpretation. However, the relatively high standard deviation (SD ≈ 1.32) indicates variability in responses, meaning that for some respondents the words posed considerable difficulty. To better understand the distribution of lexical difficulty, frequency percentages were examined.

TABLE 4
DISTRIBUTION OF LEXICAL DIFFICULTY (PERCENTAGES)

Rating	Percentage (%)
1	27.22
2	13.16
3	33.16
4	14.81
5	11.65

As shown in Table 4, the largest proportion corresponds to rating 3 (33.16%), indicating that most participants perceived the words as moderately difficult. At the same time, rating 1 accounts for a substantial share (27.22%), suggesting that some words caused no difficulty at all. Higher difficulty levels (ratings 4–5) are relatively less frequent (approximately 26% combined), which confirms that the lexical items did not significantly obstruct comprehension.

An analysis of individual words reveals variation in perceived difficulty.

TABLE 5
LEXICAL DIFFICULTY BY WORD

Word	Difficulty
ghibratly	2.2785
ghazab	2.5190
ghaqaid	2.7848
khalaf	2.8608
ghadet	2.6835
sirat	2.7975
tamigh	2.8608
shahbaz	2.8354
ghaqyl	2.7848
yskhat	2.6456

These results show clear differences among lexical items. The lowest difficulty score was observed for ghibratly (M = 2.28), suggesting that its meaning may be relatively accessible through intuition or prior linguistic experience. Similarly, ghazab (M = 2.52) and yskhat (M = 2.65) were also perceived as comparatively easier.

In contrast, the highest difficulty scores were found for khalaf (M = 2.86), tamigh (M = 2.86), shahbaz (M = 2.84), and sirat (M ≈ 2.80). These words are typically associated with religious or historical contexts and occur less frequently in modern usage, which likely contributes to their increased difficulty.

Nevertheless, it is important that all mean values fall within the range of 2.2–2.9. This indicates that the analyzed vocabulary is not entirely unfamiliar but remains at least partially accessible, often through contextual inference. Thus, while lexical difficulty is present, it does not prevent overall comprehension of the texts.

Furthermore, the results suggest that readers rely not only on the individual meanings of words but also on contextual information when interpreting texts. Even when participants did not know the exact meanings of certain words, they were able to infer their functional role within the text. This highlights a key feature of poetic text perception: meaning is constructed not solely at the lexical level but through the overall textual structure.

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Overall, the findings demonstrate that lexical difficulty has only a partial effect on text comprehension, and that the analyzed words are not entirely alien to the reader.

C. Poetic Effect of Lexical Items

At the third stage of the study, the poetic effect of lexical items was analyzed. This indicator was calculated based on participants' evaluations of how each word contributed to the emotional and aesthetic perception of the stanza (effect_all). The overall results showed a mean poetic effect of M = 3.73 with a standard deviation of SD = 1.28. This indicates that the analyzed words produced a generally positive poetic impression and contributed to the artistic quality of the texts.

TABLE 6
OVERALL POETIC EFFECT

Variable	Mean	SD
Poetic effect	3.7329	1.2800

A mean value around 3.7 is significant, as it shows that participants not only understood the lexical items but also evaluated them positively in aesthetic terms. Thus, bookish religious vocabulary performs not only a semantic but also an aesthetic function.

To further examine the distribution of poetic effect, frequency percentages were analyzed.

TABLE 7
DISTRIBUTION OF POETIC EFFECT (PERCENTAGES)

Rating	Percentage (%)
1	8.73
2	6.08
3	28.10
4	17.34
5	39.75

As shown in Table 7, the largest proportion corresponds to the highest rating (5 points, 39.75%), indicating that most participants evaluated the poetic effect as strong. Ratings of 4 (17.34%) and 3 (28.10%) also account for substantial shares. In contrast, low ratings (1–2) are relatively rare (approximately 15%), confirming that the lexical items generally produced a positive aesthetic impact.

Differences in poetic effect across individual lexical items are presented below.

TABLE 8
POETIC EFFECT BY LEXICAL ITEM

Word	Effect
ghibratly	4.0000
ghazab	3.9494
ghaqaid	3.5443
khalaf	3.5949
ghadet	3.7468
sirat	3.7595
tamigh	3.6076
shahbaz	3.6835
ghaqyl	3.8354
yskhat	3.6076

The results show that the highest poetic effect was observed for ghibratly (M = 4.00) and ghazab (M ≈ 3.95). Their semantic clarity and emotional connotations may have enhanced their aesthetic perception. Similarly, ghaqyl (M ≈ 3.84) and ghadet (M ≈ 3.75) also demonstrated relatively high effect, indicating their important stylistic role in the text.

Lower, though still positive, values were observed for ghaqaid (M ≈ 3.54), khalaf (M ≈ 3.59), and tamigh (M ≈ 3.61). These words may be less familiar or more complex, which could slightly reduce their perceived poetic impact. However, none of the values fall below 3.5, indicating that their effect is not weak.

Overall, all lexical items fall within the range of 3.5–4.0, demonstrating a consistently positive poetic effect. This suggests that lexical complexity does not diminish aesthetic perception; rather, it may even enhance it to some extent.

These findings highlight the importance of the relationship between sound, form, and meaning in poetic texts. Even when participants did not fully understand the exact meanings of certain words, they were still able to perceive their emotional and stylistic qualities. This confirms the multilayered nature of poetic perception: meaning is constructed not only through semantics but also through phonetic and associative dimensions.

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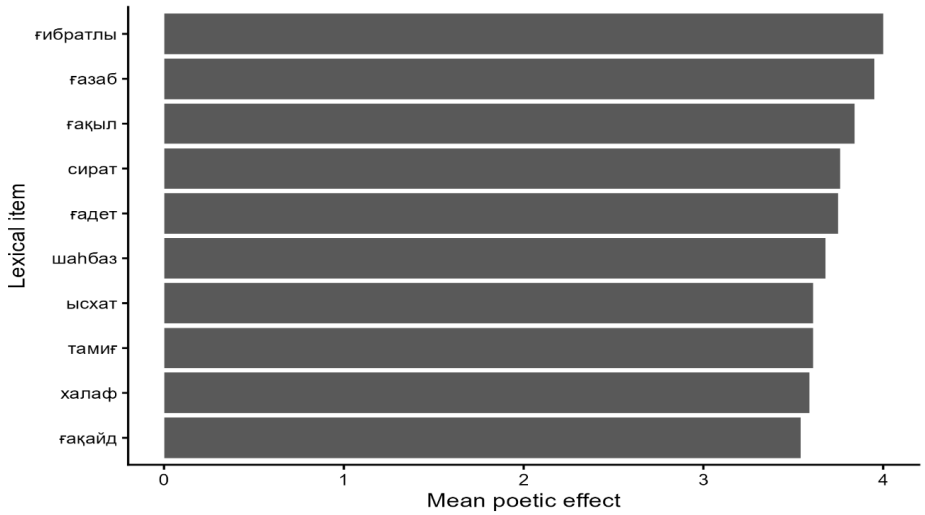


Figure 1. Poetic Effect of Lexical Items

Figure 1 visually represents the poetic effect of the analyzed lexical items. All mean values fall within the range of 3.5–4.0, indicating a stable positive aesthetic impact. The highest values are observed for ghibratly and ghazab, while ghaqaid and khalaf show relatively lower scores, though still within the overall positive range. In general, the results demonstrate that, despite lexical complexity, these items contribute positively to the artistic perception of the text.

In summary, the analyzed lexical items received consistently high evaluations in terms of poetic effect and contribute positively to the overall aesthetic perception of the texts.

D. A/B Comparison of Lexical Variants

At the final stage of the study, participants' preferences between the original (bookish/religious) and simplified (modern explanatory) variants were analyzed. This analysis aimed to determine which of the two versions (A – original form, B – simplified form) was perceived as more comprehensible and more effective. The results were calculated in percentages, allowing for the identification of general trends.

TABLE 9
A/B CHOICE RESULTS (COMPREHENSIBILITY, %)

Word	A (%)	B (%)
1	16.46	83.54
2	16.46	83.54
3	11.39	88.61
4	18.99	81.01
5	12.66	87.34
6	21.52	78.48
7	17.72	82.28
8	11.39	88.61
9	16.46	83.54
10	15.19	84.81

The results in Table 9 reveal a clear and consistent pattern: in almost all cases, the majority of participants preferred option B (the simplified or modern variant). The proportion of B ranges from 78% to 89% across all lexical items. This strongly indicates that participants prioritize comprehensibility when interpreting poetic texts.

The largest differences are observed for words 3 and 8 (B ≈ 88.6%), suggesting that these lexical items were likely the least familiar or most difficult for participants, leading to a strong preference for their simplified equivalents. The smallest difference is found for word 6 (B ≈ 78.5%), where, although B still dominates, the proportion of A is relatively higher (≈21.5%). This may indicate that certain words are somewhat more familiar to participants.

Overall, the proportion of A remains consistently low, ranging from 11% to 22%. This demonstrates that original bookish religious forms occupy a weaker position in terms of comprehensibility for modern readers. While such vocabulary enriches the text stylistically, it may complicate the process of understanding.

It is important to interpret these findings in relation to previous results. Section 3.2 showed that lexical difficulty is moderate, and the current results demonstrate its practical consequence: participants systematically choose more understandable alternatives. At the same time, although Section 3.3 revealed a high level of poetic effect, this factor does not play a decisive role compared to comprehensibility.

Thus, the findings suggest the following hierarchy in reader perception:

– first: comprehensibility

– second: lexical ease (difficulty)

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– third: poetic effect

This hierarchy is clearly reflected in the A/B choices, as participants consistently favored clarity over aesthetic or traditional forms.

These results also raise important implications for adapting poetic texts to modern audiences. If the goal is to enhance accessibility, complex religious and bookish vocabulary should be explained or replaced. However, if the goal is to preserve stylistic authenticity and tradition, such vocabulary can be maintained as a means of enhancing poetic effect.

In conclusion, the A/B comparison demonstrates that comprehensibility is the dominant factor for modern readers, and simplified language variants are consistently preferred.

IV. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the perception of bookish religious vocabulary in Akmulla's poetry is a complex and multilayered process. The data show that the relationship between text comprehension, lexical complexity, and poetic effect is not linear. This aligns with reader-response theory, where meaning is not given but constructed through interaction between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1978).

The relatively high level of comprehensibility (M = 3.64) indicates that participants were able to understand the texts even without full lexical knowledge. Readers rely on context, intuition, and linguistic experience to construct meaning. This supports the view that comprehension is an active cognitive process rather than simple decoding (Westwood, 2009).

The moderate level of lexical difficulty (M = 2.70) and its weak correlation with comprehensibility (r = 0.07) suggest that difficult words do not significantly disrupt understanding. This implies that, beyond vocabulary knowledge, contextual and structural cues play a crucial role in comprehension (Nagy, 1988). At the same time, the partial loss of religious and Sufi terminology in modern linguistic consciousness explains the variability in responses (Akhmetbekova, 2013).

One of the key findings is the high level of poetic effect (M = 3.73). This shows that readers perceive texts not only cognitively but also emotionally and aesthetically. In poetry, form and expressiveness remain important even when full comprehension is lacking (Jakobson, 1960). Moreover, the poetry of akyns historically served both artistic and spiritual-educational functions (Däribaiuly, 2017; Safari & Mohaghegh Montazeri, 2017).

The weak but significant correlation between lexical difficulty and poetic effect ($r = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$) suggests that complex words may enhance rather than reduce aesthetic impact. Rare or unfamiliar vocabulary can increase expressiveness, confirming that poetic language serves not only an informational but also an aesthetic function (Cushing, 2020).

Word-level analysis supports this interpretation: familiar words showed higher comprehensibility, while less familiar ones were rated lower, yet their poetic effect remained relatively stable. This indicates that lexical knowledge influences comprehension but does not fully determine aesthetic perception (Baumann, 2005).

The A/B comparison results clearly reveal readers' strategies: the majority (≈80–88%) preferred simplified variants. This demonstrates that accessibility is a key factor for modern readers. At the same time, historical bookish vocabulary undergoes transformation and reinterpretation in contemporary language (Akhmetbekova, 2013).

Overall, the findings confirm the multidimensional nature of poetic perception. Comprehensibility, lexical complexity, and poetic effect are interrelated but not fully aligned. Poetic understanding emerges from the interaction of cognitive and aesthetic processes. Furthermore, bookish religious vocabulary functions not merely as a linguistic element but as a carrier of cultural and spiritual meaning (Däribaiuly, 2017).

One limitation of this study is its cultural and linguistic specificity. The participants were contemporary Kazakh-speaking readers, and their interpretations may be influenced by their educational background, cultural experience, and familiarity with religious vocabulary. Therefore, the findings may not be directly generalizable to readers from different linguistic or cultural contexts. Future studies could compare responses across different reader groups and cultural settings.

V. Conclusion

This study aimed to empirically examine how bookish religious vocabulary in Akmulla's poetry is perceived by modern Kazakh-speaking readers. The results demonstrate that the relationship between comprehension, lexical complexity, and poetic effect is complex and non-linear.

First, the findings show that overall text comprehensibility is above average. Readers are able to construct meaning not only from individual words but from the broader context. Thus, incomplete understanding of certain lexical items does not prevent overall comprehension, highlighting the cognitive nature of poetic perception.

Second, lexical difficulty results indicate that the analyzed words are not fully familiar to modern readers but remain accessible. Although some bookish and religious terms are perceived as difficult, their impact on comprehension is limited. This confirms the importance of contextual and structural factors.

Third, the study reveals that poetic effect remains high. Even when participants do not fully understand specific words, they still positively evaluate the emotional and aesthetic impact of the text. This supports the idea that poetic language performs an aesthetic as well as an informational function. The weak but significant relationship between difficulty and effect further suggests that complex vocabulary may enhance expressiveness.

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The A/B comparison shows that modern readers tend to prefer more accessible language. However, this does not diminish the artistic value of complex vocabulary. Instead, the findings highlight a dual-level perception: comprehension is dominant at the cognitive level, while complex lexical forms retain their impact at the aesthetic level.

In conclusion, poetic text perception is a multidimensional process. Bookish religious vocabulary is not merely a source of difficulty but also an important element shaping the aesthetic and cultural meaning of the text. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how traditional lexical layers are perceived in contemporary Kazakh literary context.

Future research should expand the corpus, include works of other poets, and compare different age and educational groups. In addition, more detailed qualitative analysis would help to better identify readers' interpretive strategies.

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