

A Comparative Study of English and Russian Translations of Poetic Figures in *Kutadgu Bilig* from the Perspective of Readers' Acceptance

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Abstract

This study critically evaluates the translations of poetic figures in *Kutadgu Bilig* (*Wisdom of Royal Glory*), a foundational work of Turkic-Islamic literature, with a particular emphasis on the manner in which these figures are captured in the English and Russian translations. The study looks at the cultural and linguistic elements that affect how readers understand the text, using reception theory as a guide (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978). It looks at how the translation methods used by Robert Dankoff (English, 1983) and Sergei Ivanov (Russian, 1971) are different and how these methods affect how readers perceive and enjoy metaphors, parallelism, symbolism, allegory, and personification. The results indicate that Russian translations are more faithful to the original since they are closer to the culture, while English translations focus on being clear and easy to understand rather than being rich in style. The article suggests using hybrid translation methods that strike a compromise between being true to the original text and being for readers to understand.

Keywords: *Kutadgu Bilig*, poetic figures, translation, reception theory, cultural-linguistic differences, metaphor, parallelism, symbolism, allegory, personification, reader acceptance.

Introduction

One of the most important works in Turkic literature is *Kutadgu Bilig* (*Wisdom of Royal Glory*), which was composed by Yusuf Khass Hajib in the 11th century (Dankoff, 1983). This study contributes to the field of comparative translation by

examining the diverse interpretations of poetry figures across various languages and cultures. It also shows how translation choices affect how readers respond. This didactic poem is both morally sound and poetically excellent, relying on the rich traditions of Turkic and Islamic thought. The text's use of complicated poetic figures like metaphors, parallelism, symbolism, allegory, and personification makes it challenging for translators to do their jobs, especially when they have to deal with languages that are very different from each other, like Russian and English.

This study looks at how two well-known translations of *Kutadgu Bilig*, Robert Dankoff's 1983 English version and Sergei Ivanov's 1971 Russian version, deal with the translations of poetic figures. This study employs reception theory, which looks at how the text and its readers interact (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978; Holub, 2005), to look at how readers' cultural origins and expectations affect how they embrace these poetic figures. More specifically, it looks at how being close in language and culture affects translation efforts and how those strategies affect how readers react.

The first part of this research looks at reception theory and how it relates to translation. It then looks at how the variations in language and culture between Russian and English affect the translation of poetic figures in *Kutadgu Bilig*. The study looks at how different groups of people react to metaphors, parallelism, symbolism, allegory, and personification. At the end of the paper, there is a discussion regarding what the result means for future translation techniques.

1. Reception Theory and its Relation to Translation

Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser were the first to write about reception theory, which says that readers play an active part in how they understand texts (Iser, 1978; Jauss, 1982). This theory states that a reader's “horizon of expectation” affects how they understand a book. Cultural, historical, and literary settings influence this “horizon of expectation” (Holub, 2005).

This is especially important for translation studies, as translators must not only convey meaning but also adapt the text to the target audience's cultural and literary expectations (Munday, 2022; Venuti, 2012).

When it comes to poetic figures, reception theory helps us understand how diverse groups of people react to metaphors, parallelism, symbolism, allegory, and personification. These poetic figures typically include cultural references that are difficult to translate into other languages (Jakobson, 1960; Leech, 2008). For instance, Russian readers might be accustomed to metaphors that use Islamic or



Turkic images, but English readers who are not familiar with these cultural themes might need to change them (Sertkaya, 2001).

This study uses reception theory to look at the translation tactics used by Dankoff and Ivanov. It looks at how each version meets the needs of its target audience. It looks at how the translations keep or change the poetic richness of the original text and how these changes affect how readers feel about the poetic figures.

2. Cultural-Linguistic Differences and Their Influence upon Translation

Translation is more than just a linguistic task; it's also a cultural one (Bassnett, 2014; Apter, 2013). The translator has to deal with big cultural and linguistic disparities between the source and target languages when translating a text like *Kutadgu Bilig* that is full of cultural references. These distinctions influence the translation of poetic figures in *Kutadgu Bilig*, as detailed in the subsequent section.

2.1 Cultural Proximity

The cultural background has a big impact on how well a translation connects with its audience (Even-Zohar, 2002). Russian readers, especially those who know Turkic or Islamic literature, probably have more in common with *Kutadgu Bilig* than English-speaking readers do. Because of this cultural closeness, the original images and metaphors may be translated more directly.

Russian culture also incorporates many Sufi and Islamic literary patterns, including the symbolic use of light and darkness. For example, they are common in *Kutadgu Bilig* (Ivanov, 1971). These themes are also very important in Russian Orthodox Christianity, where “light” often means spiritual guidance. Because of this, Russian readers can understand the metaphors and symbolism in *Kutadgu Bilig* better without having to make many changes.

English readers, on the other hand, may find these kinds of references strange or difficult to understand, especially if they are unfamiliar with anything about Turkic or Islamic traditions. Translators of *Kutadgu Bilig* for English speakers sometimes use techniques like compensation (changing or replacing cultural references) or clarification (adding explanatory glosses) to make the text easier to understand. Translating a metaphor that utilises a “lamp” into English could result in a “guiding star”. This is still a metaphor, but it is more known to readers in the West (Newmark, 1988; Baker and Saldanha, 2020).

2.2 Linguistic Constraints

The differences in structure between Russian and English also affect the translation process (Hatim and Mason, 1997). Russian is a synthetic language, which means that it depends more on changing word order and inflection. This language feature lets Russian translators keep the original text's syntactic and morphological structures with very few changes. For example, while translating metaphors, Russian translators might keep the same word forms and sentence structures as the original.

In contrast, English is an analytic language, which means it relies more on the sequence of words and extra words to make sense (Chesterman, 2016). Because of this, English translators often have to change the structure of complicated metaphors or restate them in simpler terms. These alterations can make the translation lose some of its poetic rhythm or nuance.

2.3 Target Audience

The intended audience also significantly influences translation strategies. Ivanov's 1971 Russian translation of *Kutadgu Bilig* was meant for scholars who already knew a little about Turkic and Islamic traditions. Ivanov's translation keeps a lot of the cultural and linguistic richness of the original text, which could be challenging for a broad reader (Ivanov, 1971).

Dankoff's English translation was made easier to understand for those unfamiliar with Turkic or Islamic literature. Because of this, Dankoff makes a lot of the text's poetic elements, like metaphor, allegory, and personification, easier to understand and changes them to fit with Western literary traditions (Dankoff, 1983; Venuti, 2012). This method prioritises ensuring that the reader understands the text over maintaining fidelity to the cultural specifics of the original work. The next section shows how these translation strategies work in practice by comparing fifteen poetry figures from *Kutadgu Bilig*. Using reception theory, each example looks at how translated forms affect readers' emotional engagement, aesthetic reaction, and cultural understanding in both English and Russian settings.

3. Readers' Acceptance of Poetic Figures in *Kutadgu Bilig*: Metaphor, Parallelism, Symbolism, Allegory, and Personification

How well poetic figures fit in with the cultural and linguistic expectations of their intended audience has a big impact on how well they are received. In *Kutadgu Bilig*, metaphors, parallelism (*tazeen*), symbolism, allegory, and personification are important stylistic and teaching tools that show the text's moral and philosophical precepts. These numbers come from the social and religious background of Turkic-

Islamic philosophy, and people from different languages and cultures interpret them differently. This section provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of the manner in which these poetic features are represented in the English and Russian translations, with a reference to the original Turkic text when applicable. The analysis utilises reception theory to assess the impact of these translated figures on the comprehension, emotional engagement, and aesthetic appreciation of readers (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978).

3.1 Metaphors

Metaphors in *Kutadgu Bilig* do two things: they give spiritual and moral insights and keep the poem's rich texture. This duality lets the book be both a moral guide and a work of imaginative poetry. These metaphors come from Islamic, Turkic, and nomadic cultures; hence, they need translation procedures that take culture into account. Reception theory says that readers understand these kinds of figures through their “horizon of expectations”, which is affected by their culture (Jauss, 1982). This means that the role of the translator is crucial in making sense of the text.

Consider the metaphorical phrase “*Bilgäch çıraq bolur, yoq bolsa yol ağır*”, which translates to “The wise man becomes a lamp; without it, the road is difficult”. Dankoff translates this as “Wisdom lights the path of the bewildered”. This English translation uses a frequent idiom to make things clear and give advice, but it replaces the spiritually charged image of “*çıraq*” (ritual lamp) with a more general metaphor. The holy flame, which is essential to Sufi and Turkic-Islamic symbols, is decreased. In contrast, Ivanov's Russian translation “*Мудрость — светильник, ведущий заблудших*” conserves both poetic resonance and religious profundity by employing the terms “*светильник*” (lamp) and “*зablудших*” (the lost). The metaphor works well for Russian readers because it uses Orthodox liturgical language and Sufi imagery, which makes it more spiritual. So, even though Dankoff's version is easier to understand, Ivanov's keeps the metaphor's original power and theological depth.

“*Aql at olur, adäm binär*”, which means “Reason is a horse, and man rides it”, is another example. It uses images from horseback riding in nomadic Turkic life. Dankoff's translation, “Wisdom serves as a vehicle for action”, turns the metaphor into conceptual language. This adaptation is functionally correct, but it takes away the culturally important symbol of the horse, which is a sign of strength, control, and agency in Turkic oral tradition. Ivanov's Russian translation, “*Разум — это конь*”,



на котором едет человек”, preserves the vivid metaphor. Russian readers, who know the horse as a moral and folkloric figure, are more likely to understand the connection between reason and control. According to Iser (1978), readers' cultural knowledge fills in the gaps in the text in this example. This lets Russian readers emotionally understand the metaphor, while English readers see it as a filtered abstraction.

“*Til yaman bolsa, baş keser*” is another metaphor that means “If the tongue is evil, it cuts off the head”. Dankoff chooses the phrase “A wicked tongue brings ruin”, which communicates the moral message and mitigates the violent imagery. This may be what English readers like about a more moderate moral tone, but it loses the drama. Ivanov's rendition, “*Злой язык рубит голову*”, keeps the raw emotion and sounds like Russian proverbs and idioms that warn about the dangers of talking too much. The metaphor's severity fits with Russian language rules, making it have a stronger, more culturally appropriate effect.

In all of these examples, Ivanov's translations stay true to the cultural and emotional depth of the original metaphors. Ivanov maintains the spiritual tone and visual strength, adhering to Russian interpretive traditions. Dankoff uses dynamic equivalency (Nida, 1964) to put functional meaning and idiomatic fluency first, even if it means losing part of the lyrical and symbolic depth. The reception theory (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978) helps make sense of these different reactions: English readers come across metaphors that have been changed to fit modern sensibilities, while Russian readers have a more complex experience that is formed by shared metaphorical and religious frameworks.

3.2 Parallelism (*Tazeen*)

In Turkic tradition, *tazeen* is the same thing as parallelism. It gives *Kutadgu Bilig's* moral and emotional differences and similarities through balanced, symmetrical phrases. This method, which comes from Turkic oral and Islamic teaching literature, makes the rhythm stronger and the moral message clearer. Parallelism improves rhetorical flow, as noted by Leech (2008), and reception theory emphasises the influence of readers' cultural expectations on their recognition and appreciation of such patterns (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978).

The phrase “*Bilgü söz altun, biligsüz söz toprak*” (“Wise words are gold, foolish words are dust”) is a perfect example of *tazeen* because it uses a strong binary metaphor. “The words of the wise are precious; the words of fools are worthless” is

Dankoff's English translation. It is clear, although it loses the tight rhythm by repeating “the words of...”. This repetition makes the original less powerful. Ivanov's Russian “*Речь мудреца — золото, речь глупца — прах*”, on the other hand, keeps the short parallelism and strong metaphor, which is typical of Russian proverbs. The passage keeps the rhythm and moral weight, which fits well with Russian readers' literary traditions (Jakobson, 1960).

Another example is “*Köngül bađlu bolsa, köni yoq bolsa bađır ađır*” (“If the heart is attached but the beloved is absent, the soul aches”). This poem shows the difference between emotional connection and loss. Dankoff changes the grammar to express the feeling, which makes the rhythmic symmetry less sharp. Ivanov's “*Если сердце приязно, но любимого нет — болит душа*” is quite similar to the original in terms of form, which makes the emotional impact even stronger. Russian readers, accustomed to poetic expressions of longing, truly resonate with this grammatical faithfulness (Iser, 1978).

The proverb “*Tili acı bolsa, özü yaman olur*” (“If the tongue is bitter, the self is evil”) exemplifies the concept of moral cause and effect. The directness of Dankoff's metaphorical “A bitter tongue reflects a bitter soul” is diminished, while Ivanov's “*Горький язык — знак злого человека*” (“A bitter tongue is a sign of an evil person”) conveys a sharper, didactic judgement. The Russian version's shortness and balance make its moral power stronger, making the message easy to remember and culturally relevant.

Ivanov's translations keep the original's syntactic symmetry and semantic contrasts in these circumstances, which keeps *tazeen's* poetic function. Dankoff's predilection for dynamic equivalence makes things clearer, but it can also hurt formal structure at times. The reception theory makes it clear that Ivanov's style is easier for Russian readers to understand since they are used to traditions that value aphoristic accuracy. English readers' acceptance of looser parallelism for semantic transparency reflects their diverse cultural reading horizons (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978).

3.3 Symbolism

Symbolism in *Kutadgu Bilig* functions as a coded language that imbues emotional profundity and culturally embedded values, rather than mere ornamentation. The text uses animals, celestial bodies, and threads to create a symbolic system that is both morally educational and full of poetic meaning. The

theory of reception aligns with the cultural expectations of the readers (Jauss, 1982). Translation helps this process by either keeping the symbolic framework the same or changing it to meet the mythopoetic traditions of the culture it is meant for (Lotman, 1977; Fabb, 2022).

The Turkic phrase “*Qartal batirliqqa uqur, bulbul sevdä üşür*” (“The eagle flies to bravery, the nightingale burns with love”) has been translated into English. Dankoff's English rendition, “The eagle embodies bravery; the nightingale represents affection”, uses the more general terms “embodies” and “represents” to make the original images less immediate. Symbolic nouns are directly preserved in Ivanov's “*Орёл — символ отваги, соловей — голос любви*”. The term “*голос любви*” (“voice of love”) elicits emotional immediacy and intimacy, which is consistent with Russian literary traditions that attribute expressive states to birds. This choice makes sense to Russian readers since it fits with their cultural codes, which means they can understand the symbolism without thinking about it too much, as reception theory would anticipate (Jauss, 1982).

Another little variation is the metaphor of weak and strong threads in “*Qayigü—köp üzüg, säbir—teg üzüg*” (“Sorrow is a broken string; patience is a steady thread”). Dankoff's English version keeps the concept, although it leans more towards explanation, which makes it less poetic. Ivanov's “*Печаль — порванная нить, терпение — крепкая струна*” (“Sorrow — torn thread; patience — strong string”) shows how things feel and sound. The Russian word selections have a stronger sensory effect, which makes the symbolic opposition stronger. Lotman's (1977) focus on “structural fidelity” and “rhythmic coherence” helps us understand how Ivanov's flexible syntax maintains the metaphor's poetic integrity and makes the reader feel more involved.

The cosmological symbols in “*Kün — aqil belgisi, ay — köngül nişanı*” (“The sun marks wisdom; the moon signals the soul”) demonstrate divergent stylistic approaches. Dankoff's use of “marks” and “signals” clearly conveys the idea, albeit with a slightly flattened metaphysical tone. Ivanov's “*Солнце — знак разума, луна — символ души*” (“Sun — sign of reason; moon — symbol of soul”) puts these connections into short sentences that come from Slavic metaphysical tradition. Jauss (1982) talks about how important mythopoetic codes are for understanding symbolic depth. This economy of expression and culturally relevant language probably makes Russian readers more open to the text.



In all of these cases, Ivanov's translations use Russian literary standards that promote metaphorical condensing and complex symbolism. This method increases reader interest by employing familiar symbolic grammars. On the other hand, Dankoff's versions put clarity and ease of use first, which can make the symbols less rich. This difference can be explained by reception theory, which says that cultural frameworks impact how readers receive and interpret texts (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978). Ivanov's choices, which are based on culture, tend to make things resonate right away, while Dankoff's choices tend to explain them.

3.4 Allegory

In *Kutadgu Bilig*, allegory is a critical narrative device that enables characters to embody abstract ideals to express moral and philosophical teachings (Fletcher, 1964). In “*Kün Togdi*”, the main character represents the idea of justice; in “*Ay Toldi*”, the main character represents the idea of fortune; and in “*Ögdülmüş*”, the main character represents wisdom. Culturally rooted symbols, which form the text's educational aim, demonstrate these ideas. The reception theory shows that how readers receive these allegories depends on their cultural backgrounds and expectations of the interpretation, which affects how they interact with them (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978).

“*Kün Togdi*”, which means “The One Who Brings the Day”, stands for justice and law. Dankoff translates the phrase as “Judge” or “Justice”, which is clearer but loses the poetic meaning that comes from the name's personification. Ivanov's “*Справедливость*” (Justice) keeps this abstraction as a noun that stands for an ideal. This approach aligns with Russian traditions, where allegorical figures typically depict moral characteristics. This style aligns with Russian readers' familiarity with folklore and fables, encouraging them to engage more deeply with the text, which corresponds to Iser's (1978) concept of the “implied reader”.

Dankoff simplifies “*Ay Toldi*” (“The One Full of the Moon”), which means “fortune” or “happiness”, to “Fortune”, which takes away the deep mythical meaning. Ivanov's translations “*Счастье*” or “*Фортуна*” keep the mythic and celestial meanings that the moon has in both Turkic and Slavic cosmologies. Russian readers, who are accustomed to this kind of symbolism, are more likely to see this allegory as multi-layered and based on their own. According to reception theory, this common semiotic knowledge makes reading more enjoyable (Jauss, 1982; Fletcher, 1964).

Dankoff's “Counsellor”, or “Wise Man”, emphasises functional clarity for “Ögdülmüş” (“The Praised One”), which represents wisdom and counsel at the expense of metaphoric profundity. Ivanov's “Myðpey” (“Sage”) is based on mythological characters that are firmly rooted in Russian culture. Lotman (1977) says that these kinds of archetypes act as structural signals of authority and expertise, adding depth to the allegory's meaning and making it easier for readers to get into it.

Ivanov consistently employs abstract, culturally relevant words in all these cases, preserving the symbolic identities woven within *Kutadgu Bilig*. Dankoff tries to make things easier to understand by turning allegorical figures into real people, which can make poems less complicated. The reception theory helps explain this difference: Ivanov's readers, accustomed to anthropomorphic abstraction, excel in comprehending the intricate allegories. Readers of Dankoff, on the other hand, are better able to understand the functional translations since they are not as familiar with allegorical norms (Iser, 1978; Fletcher, 1964; Jauss, 1982).

3.5 Personification

Personification in *Kutadgu Bilig* is more than just a pretty picture; it is a structural tool that gives abstract moral and philosophical ideas voice, agency, and emotional presence (Preminger and Brogan, 1993). *Kutadgu Bilig* depicts concepts like wisdom, law, and fortune as speaking, feeling agents that influence the narrative through dialogue and moral instruction. This animation encourages reflective engagement with the ethical dilemmas present in the text, in addition to fostering reader empathy. According to reception theory, how readers understand these personified agents depends on their cultural expectations and literary traditions (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978).

The phrase “*Aqil aytadur*” (“Wisdom speaks”) shows wisdom as a living, talking thing in the original language. Dankoff regularly turns these kinds of statements into narrative commentary, making it difficult to tell where the character ends and the narrator begins. This changes the rhetorical tone from direct personification to interpretive summary, thereby reducing the immediacy and affective weight of the original. Ivanov retains the direct speech “*Myðpocmь зовопум*”, which portrays wisdom as an animated figure. This approach makes sense to Russian readers who are used to fables and didactic stories where abstract ideas often talk. According to Jauss's (1982) “horizon of expectations”, Ivanov's



readers are more likely to accept and interact with these anthropomorphic figures since they are used to reading about them in books.

The writing style of “*Töre künderi til aytadur*” (“The Law speaks for the days”) differs significantly. Dankoff's version, “Law guides all days ahead”, changes the law from a speaking agency to a guiding concept. It is obvious and idiomatic, but it loses the original's dramatic power. Ivanov's “*Закон говорит за все дни*” keeps the rhetorical structure and makes the idea of law as a living, powerful force even stronger. This translation follows Russian literary conventions, where justice and law are typically personified as representing both divine and social order. Iser's (1978) concept of the “implied reader” helps explain this strategy: Ivanov's readers are ready to see law not only as an idea but as a person, which makes the moral logic of the text more captivating.

Another excellent example is the words “*Baht közü kör bolur, eger ihtiyatsiz barsa*”. Dankoff translates this as “Fortune fails without caution”, which is a practical translation that shortens the word but omits the visuals. Ivanov's “*Судьба слепнет, если идти без осторожности*” (“Fate goes blind if one proceeds without caution”) keeps the metaphor of fortune as a seeing or blind individual. This translation conjures the archetype of “Fortuna caeca”, a figure that is well-known in both classical and Slavic traditions. Lotman (1977) says that culturally resonant metaphors make symbolic communication stronger. In this case, Ivanov's rendition keeps a strong visual and emotional register that makes readers think more deeply.

In all of these cases, Ivanov keeps the living voices of abstract ideas, which is in line with Russian storytelling styles that prefer allegorical and rhetorical personification. His method encourages readers to see these notions not as fixed ideals but as living beings that help shape moral reasoning. Dankoff's use of abstract generalisations may make things clearer for English readers who are not used to anthropomorphised ideals, but it comes at the cost of lyrical power and dialogic complexity. The reception hypothesis explains this difference: when personification fits with culturally recognised ways of talking, readers are more likely to connect with the text on an emotional and intellectual level (Jauss, 1982; Iser, 1978; Preminger and Brogan, 1993).

Conclusion

The analysis shows that Russian translations of *Kutadgu Bilig* do a better job of keeping the original text's poetic depth. This improvement is mostly because



Turkic and Russian cultures and languages are so similar. Metaphors, parallelism, symbolism, allegory, and personification are rendered more accurately due to the Russian language's adaptability. In contrast, English translations, especially Dankoff's, put accessibility and clarity before stylistic nuance. This approach creates a version that may attract a broader audience, but it fails to fully convey the original's poetic impact.

Future translations of *Kutadgu Bilig* could perform better if they used hybrid tactics that balance staying true to the original text with meeting the needs of the target audience. For instance, annotated translations could include greater background on culturally particular poetic figures, letting readers connect more deeply with the text's rich literary past without making it harder to read (Bassnett, 2014; Cronin, 2003).

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