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From “Aqyl” to Reason: Challenges of Translating Kazakh Concept in Abai Kunanbayev’s Works

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the translation of the Kazakh concept *aqyl* (reason) in Abai Kunanbayev’s prose (Book of Words) and poetry into English. As one of the author’s central philosophical categories, *aqyl* encompasses intellectual and cultural dimensions that do not always find equivalents in English. The study aims to explore how the concept *aqyl* is represented in the source texts and subsequently reconfigured in translation. Methodologically, the study combines comparative textual analysis with cognitive-linguistic and metaphor-oriented approaches. The componential analysis makes it possible to distinguish the different semantic facets of *aqyl*, which are then traced in their English equivalents. The research identifies a wide range of translation equivalents (mind, reason, intellect, wisdom, conscience, advice, sage) and classifies them according to strategies such as literal rendering, functional equivalence, conceptual transfer, and metaphorical or poetic reframing. The distribution of these variants and strategies is presented in charts, which highlight the predominance of literal renderings but also demonstrate the important role of the interpretative approaches in maintaining conceptual richness and cultural nuance. These findings highlight the methodological challenges of translating culturally embedded concepts that lack direct equivalents in the target language. The study contributes

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to broader debates in translation studies on equivalence and cultural adaptation. The research shows how translator choices influence the reception of culturally specific concepts across languages and traditions. It further illustrates how translator choices shape the semantic and cultural reception of the author's philosophical vision and underscores the need for approaches that balance linguistic accuracy with the preservation of conceptual and cultural depth.

Keywords: Abai Kunanbayev; Cognitive Linguistics; Conceptual Transfer; Kazakh Philosophy; Literary Translation

1. Introduction

The translation of culturally embedded concepts, especially those that reflect national identity and ethical viewpoint, is one of the most essential problems in translation studies field. This is the case in the works of Abai Kunanbayev (1845–1904), a well-known Kazakh poet, reformer, and thinker, who offer a singular fusion of contemporary philosophical research, Islamic spirituality, and traditional Kazakh ideals. In Abai's works, *aqyl* is not limited to rationality or logic but encompasses ethical reasoning, inner vision, and spiritual cognition. The interconnected concepts of *aqyl* (reason), *qairat* (willpower), and *jurek* (heart) are among the main components of his intellectual legacy. These three constitute the author's triadic picture of the human being, which recurs frequently in both his poetry and prose as the cornerstones of moral agency and human integrity and called as *Tolyq adam* (Perfect Man) ^[1].

Concepts similar to *aqyl* (*'aqal* in Arabic, *razum* in Russian, *reason* in English) have long been studied by scholars. Kant articulated the well-known distinction between pure and practical reason, presenting reason as a moral compass and cognitive ability that are necessary for moral behavior and autonomy. He distinguished three cognitive faculties of the mind: sensibility, understanding, and reason ^[2]. In Islamic world, scholars like Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Avicenna (Ibn Sina), and Al-Ghazali created complex classification of *'aqal* (reason) as a divine gift and a rational instrument that directs human understanding and action. The connection of reason and knowledge was particularly highlighted by al-Ghazali, who acknowledged the limitations of *'aqal* without spiritual insight yet saw it as essential for interpreting divine truth ^[3].

According to Yesim, Abai devoted significant attention to the concept of *aqyl*. From the perspective of Western European philosophical terminology, his rationalism can be regarded as deeply rooted and conceptually rich. In author's view, *aqyl* determines the stature of an individu-

al, since cognition is a distinctive attribute of the human being. Abai assigns particular importance to this cognitive function of *aqyl* ^[4].

The concept *aqyl* do not merely denote "reason" in the Western philosophy, it emerges from the nomadic and Islamic epistemology, and Sufi metaphysics that shaped Abai's intellectual universe. Its partial analogues in English – such as "reason", "intellect", "mind" or "wisdom" fail to fully capture its layered meanings. *Aqyl's* denotative meaning is a common cultural and epistemic worldview that supports it must thus be rendered in any translation. As such, translation becomes not merely a technical act but an ideological and hermeneutic negotiation across cultural paradigms.

In the case of the concept like *aqyl*, functional equivalence becomes essential. The concept of equivalence stands at the core of translation theory and practice. It refers to the degree to which the meaning, function, and effect of a word, phrase, or text in the SL is accurately conveyed in the TL ^[5]. The goal is not to reproduce the literal form but to recreate the intended impact and cognitive resonance for the target audience. As a result, equivalence in this context needs to consider both semantic content and cultural functions, requiring the use of more comprehensive frameworks like translation transformations ^[6].

Furthermore, a crucial role is played by conceptual equivalence, which is the transfer of culturally bound concepts via common cognitive or experimental schemas. According to Lakoff and Johnson ^[7] culturally situated models are frequently used to generate meaning metaphorically. *Aqyl* must therefore be re-encoded in the TL within a conceptual framework that is consistent without reducing its philosophical richness.

This study aims to investigate how *aqyl* functions as culturally ingrained idea in Abai's works and to examine the difficulties of translating it into English; to understand how the concept *aqyl* change or lose meaning when rendered by concentrating on the conceptual transfer.

The relevance of the article is crucial for a number of reasons: a) it advances a better comprehension of Kazakh philosophical discourse, which is still underrepresented in translation and literary studies worldwide; b) it draws attention to how metaphors with cultural roots influence ethical reasoning in many languages; c) it sheds light on the more general uniqueness may be obscured by common semantic equivalency.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on the Cultural Concept of *Aqyl* and Its Derivatives within Kazakh Cultural Context

Etymologically, the word *aqyl* derives from Turkic root (to perceive, to understand), with cognates across Turkic language, such as Uzbek (*aql*), Kyrgyz (*akyl*), and Tatar (*aqil*). Cross-cultural parallels have been drawn between *aqyl* and similar constructs in other traditions. In Greek philosophy, it resonates with *nous* (intellect) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom). In Confucian philosophy, it parallels *zhi* (wisdom) as part of the moral cultivation process. In Western thought, it aligns with the ideal of reason as a universal human capacity, while in Arabic-Islamic philosophy, it maintains strong conceptual ties to '*aql* a faculty integrating rationality with moral accountability.

According to Wierzbicka, the closest Russian counterparts of *mind* are the related words *um* (*oi*) and *razum* (*aqyl*), but the English *intellect* and *reason*, are viewed as "mental faculties", rather than as "entities" or pseudo-entities like soul, heart and mind. For example, babies have neither *um* and *razum*, as they don't have an *intellect* or a *reason*, whereas they do have a *mind*^[8].

In Kazakh culture, *aqyl* is understood as abstract rationality alone. It denotes judgement, moral wisdom, practical sagacity and social responsibility. The richness of the given concept is reflected in the variety of its linguistic derivatives, which illustrates its cognitive and cultural scope. For instance, *aqyl aitu* – to give advice, highlighting the instructive and mentoring function of the intellect; *aqyl qosu* – to contribute wisdom, emphasizing collective decision-making; *aqylqa salu* – to weigh with reason, underscoring rational evaluation, etc. Such expressions demonstrate that *aqyl* embedded in everyday life and discourse,

forming part of the moral and communicative fabric of Kazakh society.

The semantic field of *aqyl* is further enriched by a number of derivatives that reflect diverse dimensions. The term *aqyldy* – wise person, designates an individual who successfully embodies intellect and ethical discernment. In English, *aqyldy* – "a mind of mighty power", *aqyldy bileu* – "a sage" – *dana*, *aqyl bileu* – "fate" – *tağdyr*, *aqyldy zhan* – "in wisdom" – *danalyqta*. In the "Dictionary of the Abai's language" by A.Ysraqov, the linguist defines the word *aqyldy* as "a lot of consciousness, thinking, listening", and the word *aqylsyz* as "unconscious, thoughtless"^[9]. As defined in the "Dictionary of the Kazakh language": "an intelligent person is characterized by high level of consciousness, extensive knowledge, and prudent discernment"^[10]. In contrast, *aqylsyz* – foolish, irrational, denotes the absence of reason and often conveys recklessness and moral blindness. The expression *aqylgoi* – wise counselor, highlights a socially respected figure who offers guidance and instruction. Meanwhile, the phrase *aqylyn tabu* – finding reason, implies a return to rationality after confusion or error, or the discovery of prudent solution in challenging circumstances.

These derivatives collectively illustrate that *aqyl* is an abstract category, in addition to that it is a living cultural concept that shapes language, social relations, and moral judgment in the Kazakh worldview.

2.2. Translation Strategies: Equivalence, Metaphorical, and Conceptual Approaches for the Given Research Study

Translators employ several strategies to attain a high level of equivalency, particularly when dealing with complex concepts. The first major translation theory to gain wide influence was guided by Nida's principles. This approach is famously known as the theory of "functional equivalence" which emphasizes conveying the original message through the most natural and appropriate expressions in the target language^[11].

Metaphorical translation is another important strategy. The study assumes that abstract ideas, like reason or intellect, are constructed by metaphorical mappings rooted in cultural and psychological experiences, building on Lakoff's notion of conceptual metaphor^[7]. For instance,

whereas English mainly uses metaphors of *sharpness*, *logic*, *mental faculties*, Kazakh metaphors can describe *aqyl* as *light*, *guidance*, or *moral compass*. Abai frequently uses metaphorical language to explain abstract ideas like *aqyly kozindegi* (*wits are in the eyes*), *aqylğa birlik* (*unity of minds*), *aqyly дәлел* (*reasonable evidence*), *aqylға теріс* (*contrary to the laws of reason*), *bailausyz aqyl* (*crass brain*), etc. These metaphors do not simply decorate the text; they serve as cognitive models that shape meaning.

Conceptual transfer is an additional strategy that entails translating a term's meaning rather than its actual meaning. This works especially well when discussing philosophical or abstract concepts that lack clear linguistic equivalents. Drawing from philosophical traditions that emphasize reflective reason and ethical self-discipline, the concept of *aqyl*, for instance, can be translated onto an expanded moral-intellectual schema in English. For example, *aqyldy* (*keen-eyed sage*), instead of describing a quality of mind, the concept is personified as a wise figure. This transfer creates a familiar archetype for English readers, making the abstract concept more tangible. *Aqyly joq* (*lack soundness of mind*), the expression is reinterpreted through a Western idiom, adapts it into a recognizable TL phrase.

According to Geeraerts, cognitive techniques emphasize how knowledge and values are conveyed differently across languages and concentrate on reconstructing the conceptual model behind the phrase ^[12]. Bassentt & Boase-Beier contend that style, expressing emotional and symbolic resonance is a top priority for literary and interpretative techniques, especially in poetry writings ^[13,14]. The poetic renderings demonstrate expressive variation. For instance, *aqyldan boiy alşaq* is translated as *dragged out in some dark foetid*, while another version renders it more neutrally as *he is far from understanding*. This contrast shows how translators balance literal sense with emotive force and adapting style to poetic imagery.

Davidson's critique of the concept of incommensurable "conceptual schemes" ^[15] reinforcing the argument

that, despite linguistic and cultural variation, meaningful cross-cultural communication and translation remain achievable through interpretation and negotiation of meaning. Baker, in her work *In Other words*, discusses non-equivalence as a pervasive feature of cross-cultural translation and proposes a taxonomy of strategies to address it. These include translation by a more general word, translation by cultural substitution, and translation using a loan word explanation ^[16]. In our research, the concept *aqyl*, a combination of these may be appropriate depending on the translator's aims, whether to domesticate or foreignize the term, or to negotiate between the two.

Collectively, these frameworks enable an in-depth, culturally aware examination of *aqyl* in Abai's writings. By giving the intended reader access to *aqyl*'s complete semantic and ethical importance without oversimplifying or misrepresenting it. These approaches promote a multi-layered understanding of the source text.

3. Materials and Methods

The primary source material for this study consists of selected excerpts from the prose (*Book of Words*) and poetry of Abai Kunanbayev, with particular focus on occurrences of the concept *aqyl*. A total 35 instances (**Tables 1 and 2**) of *aqyl* and related constructions examined (e.g. "*aqyly artyq*", "*aqyly kozinde*", "*aqyldan aiyyrylu*", "*aqylğa ermek*", "*aqyl zerek*") and some of them were extracted for detailed analysis. These were paired with English renditions found in works translated by native English translators, such as R. McKayn, S. Geoghegan, J. Burnside, T. Botting, O. Shartse, D. Rottenberg. In addition to this, the rendering features of Kazakh translators as R. Kudabayeva, Z. Auezova, A. Issemberdiyeva are compared among other translation versions. The corresponding English translations served as a comparative data to identify patterns, strategies, and potential shifts in meaning.

Table 1. Examples of the translation of the concept *aqyl* in Abai Kunanbayev's Book of words.

№	Original	Translation 1 (Translated by R. McKayn)	Translation 2 (Translated by S. Geoghegan)	Translation 3 (Translated by J. Burnside)
1.	ақыл (aqyl)	high intelligence	good reason	-
2.	ақылға бірлік (aqylğa birlik)	unity ought to be in people's minds	unity resides in the mind	union of like minds

Table 1. *Cont.*

№	Original	Translation 1 (Translated by R. McKayn)	Translation 2 (Translated by S. Geoghegan)	Translation 3 (Translated by J. Burnside)
3.	ақыл табуға сөз ұға алмайсың (aqyl tabuğa söz ŭğa almaısyñ)	words of reason	you will never heed	good counsel
4.	ақыл кіру (aqyl kırıu)	gaining in wisdom	having grown older and wiser	come to understand
5.	ақыл айту (aqyl aıtu)	to the counsel and advice of wise people	others advise	the wise reprimanded
6.	ақылың жетпейді (aqylyñ jetpeıdı)	become a vessel of such high intelligence	-	lack the reason
7.	ақылы дәлел (aqyly дәlel)	reasonable arguments	for whatever reason	reasonable evidence
8.	Аллах ақыл берді (Allah aqyl berdı)	God granted you a mind	The Almighty has given you wisdom	God Almighty gave you a mind
9.	ақыл беру (aqyl beru)	on teaching	to instruct	edify and enlighten
10.	ақылдылар (aqyldylar)	reasonable and high-minded	most intelligent	sincerely high-minded
11.	ақыл үйрену (aqyl üirenu)	to become wise	intention of learning	following advice
12.	ақыл (aqyl)	conscience	wisdom	wisdom
13.	ақылы көзіндегі (aqyly közindegi)	wits are only in their eyes	some fool with but one thought in his head	-
14.	ақылдың көзін байлап (aqyldyñ közin bailap)	clouds their reason	it blinds its victim	dims the eyes of the mind
15.	ақылға теріс (aqylğa terıs)	one's own interests and sound reason	contrary to the laws of reason	contradicts reason
16.	ақылы жоқ (aqyly joq)	not by his intelligence	lack soundness of mind	lacked intelligence
17.	артық ақыл (artyq aqyl)	sublime intelligence	intelligence is immense and infinite	reason and intelligence are perfect and sublime
18.	ақылды (aqyldy)	high intelligence	an exalted mind	intelligence
19.	ақылды сақтайтұғын мінез (aqyldy saqtaitūğyn minez)	a vessel containing intelligence	accommodates knowledge and reason	the mind and knowledge are protected character
20.	ақылынан несі артық (aqylynan nesı artyq)	mind differ from	wiser than	least bit more intelligent than

Table 2. Examples of the translation of the concept *aqyl* in Abai Kunanbayev's poetry.

№	Original	Translation 1	Translation 2
1.	ақыл-ой, ар-намыс (aqyl-oi, ar-namys)	neither honest men nor wise	nor reason nor shame
2.	ақыл мені билесе (aqyl menı bilese)	-	my reason would direct my acts
3.	ақылды (aqyldy)	the keen-eyed sage	a clever man
4.	ақылды құлаққа ілмек (aqyldy құlaqqa ilmek)	the words and admonitions of the wise	the ignorant are unprepared to hear a word of wisdom
5.	әуелде бір суық мұз ақыл зерек (auelde bır suyq mūz aqyl zerek)	when your mind is as keen and as cold as ice	at first the intellect is cold as ice
6.	ақыл сөзге ынтасыз (aqyl sözge yntasyz)	dulls your mind	your minds grow dull
7.	ақылға ермек (aqylğa ermek)	wise man on himself relies	dictates of reason
8.	ақылы бар (aqyly bar)	wise	wise
9.	ақыл сенбей (aqyl senbei)	with due discernment	your intellect
10.	ақылдан айрылу (aqyldan airylu)	surely mad	are mad
11.	ақыл айтып (aqyl aıtyp)	to conflicting advice	gives different advice
12.	ақыл анық байқаған қылығыңды (aqyl anyq baiqağan qylyğyñdy)	-	still reason knows that time is treacherous
13.	ақылдан бойы алшақ (aqyldan boiy alshaq)	dragged out in some dark foetid	far from understanding
14.	ақыл айтқан (aqyl aitqan)	advice none will heed	listen to wise counsel
15.	байлаусыз ақыл (bailausyz aqyl)	crass brains	unreasoning, with half a mind at best

To support the semantic categorization of *aqyl* and ensure terminological consistency, the Oxford Qazaq dictionary ^[17] was consulted as a bilingual lexicographic source. The dictionary defines *aqyl* primarily as *mind, intellect, wits, and knowledge*, and notes its extended meanings in expressions involving *advice, idea, sage, edification*, etc. The dictionary's semantic annotations and usage examples helped identify the core and peripheral meanings of given concept.

The study using a qualitative and interpretative methodology that draws on tools from conceptual analysis, comparative textual analysis, and metaphor identification.

The analysis proceeds in three main stages:

- a) content analysis – all occurrence of *aqyl* were identified in the original Kazakh texts of Abai's words

- b) categorization/componential analysis – the extracted examples were categorized according to the context of usage, for instance, cognitive, ethical, and spiritual. This classification was important to determine whether different conceptual layers were preserved, generalized, or lost in translation (**Table 3**);
- c) comparative/contrastive analysis was applied between Kazakh and English target texts, guided by established translation strategies such as functional/dynamic equivalence (Nida), metaphorical translation (Newmark), cultural substitution of conceptual shifts (Baker).

Table 3. Components and functional aspects of the concept *aqyl*.

Component	Meaning
Cognitive ability	Reason, thinking, intellect, mind, intelligence
Moral dimension	Judgment, ethical reflection, wisdom, advise, discernment, high-minded, wit
Cultural-spiritual role	Teaching, instructing, edifying, enlightening
Emotional moderation	Rational control, self-restraint

The research treats functional equivalence and related categories as translation strategies adopted by translators, while research method involves identifying, categorizing, and critically examining these strategies in relation to the concept *aqyl*.

Each English rendering of *aqyl* was evaluated according to how effectively it preserved in the semantic content, conceptual associations and cultural function. For

selected key examples, interpretative commentary was added to elaborate the philosophical implications of the term in its original context and how those implications were carried over in translation.

To support the qualitative analysis, charts (**Figures 1 and 2**) were created based on the percentage distribution of the translation strategies employed and the equivalents in the English renderings of *aqyl*.

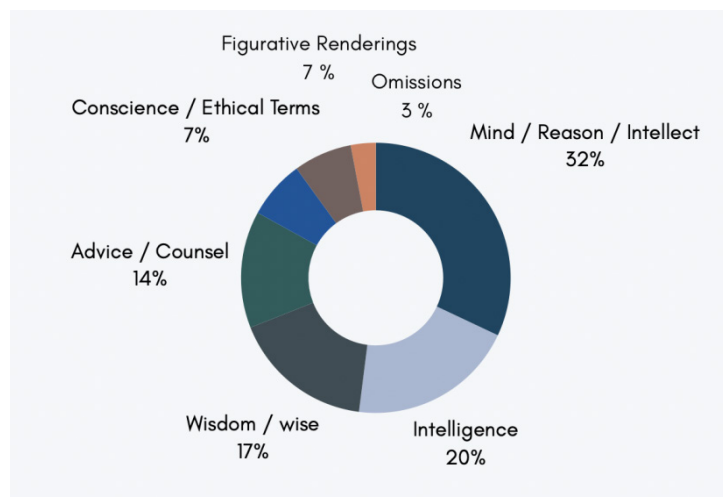


Figure 1. Distribution of translation equivalents of *aqyl* in English.

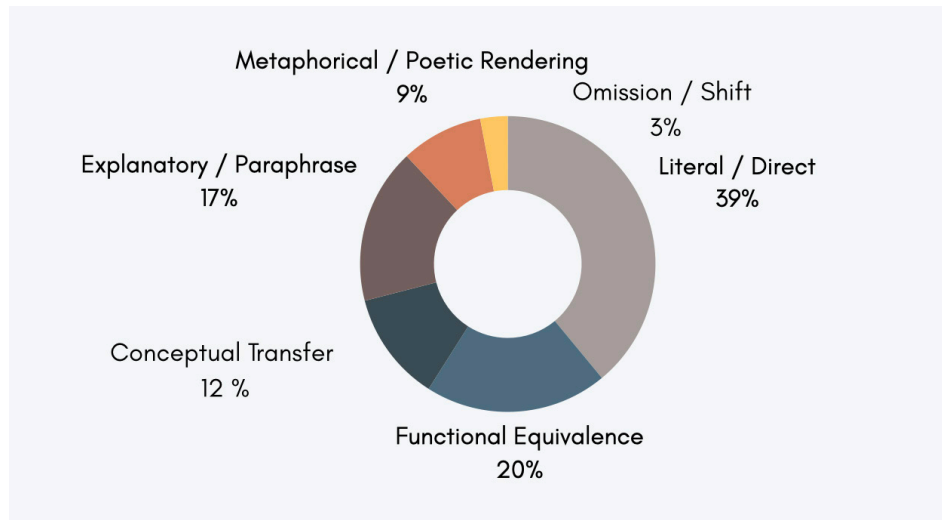


Figure 2. Distribution of Translation Strategies.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the concepts *aqyl* in selected works and their translated versions revealed a diverse application of translation strategies and various equivalents.

As illustrated in the chart, the most common is *mind*, *reason*, *intellect* reflecting translators' tendency to foreground *aqyl*'s rational-cognitive dimension. This is followed by *intelligence*, *wisdom*, *wise* which similarly emphasizes intellectual capacity but with a broader semantic scope. Overall, translators' strategies and choice of equivalents vary considerably depending on whether the target rendering aims to preserve cultural specificity or enhance TL readability.

In article, we employ componential analysis as one of the principal methods for examining and translating concepts that may be unfamiliar to the target readership. Componential analysis serves as a descriptive framework for examining semantic content, grounded in the assumption that meaning can be systematically represented through a finite set of conceptual features or semantic

components. This approach enables a structured analysis of lexical meaning by identifying and comparing the fundamental elements that constitute it. A single word may can possess multiple distinct senses, often centered around a core meaning from which various related interpretations are derived ^[18].

These components are interconnected, and in many cases, *aqyl* in author's works embodies all these aspects simultaneously. Therefore, it is difficult to fully captures the richness of the term.

The following section provides abroad and detailed analysis of selected examples. It aims to highlight how translation strategies function across different examples and deepen our understanding of the concept *aqyl*.

The example from Abai's poem *Young Men, Fun is Cheap* (Table 4), demonstrates the use of the concept *aqyl* in a context emphasizing moral discernment. The comparative analysis of two English versions highlights the translators' differing strategies conveying these underlying dimensions.

Table 4. *Aqyl* as Rational Guidance: comparative rendering in English translations.

Source Language	Target Language (Version 1)	Target Language (Version 2)
Ары бар, <i>ақылы бар</i> , ұяты бар, ата-ананың қызынан ғапыл қалма [Ary bar, aqyly bar, ūiaty bar, ata-ananyñ qyzynan ġapyl qalma] ^[19] .	But if she comes of <i>wise</i> and worthy parents, marry – she'll bring you peace of mind and health (Translated by D. Rottenberg) ^[20] .	Because it seems easy. Seek instead the daughter, of <i>wise</i> parents who have raised her properly (Translated by R. Kudabayeva) ^[1] .

Conceptually and metaphorically, *aqyl* functions inside a moral framework based on individual moral judgment in this verse. Here, *aqyl* is consistent with *ar* (a feeling of honor) and *uyat* (sense of shame, modesty), both of which are profoundly ingrained in Turkic-Islamic traditions, forming a triadic characterization of virtue.

In Rottenberg's translation (Version1), he renders *aqyly bar* as "wise", which represents a functional equivalence. It is an acceptable and contextually appropriate equivalent that reflects intelligence or good judgment. However, the choice to translate *aqyly* in a generalized manner, leads to semantic narrowing. Moreover, the explicit moral tried (*ar*, *aqyl*, *uyat*) is reduced to a paraphrased description of the patterns (wise and worthy), with the daughter's character assumed rather than stated. Additionally, the second clause, which reads "she'll bring you peace of mind and health", is an interpretative addition rather than a part of the original text. This is a domesticating technique that moves the emphasis from moral

qualities to useful marital advantages, possibly meeting the expectations of the translator's intended audience.

In the Version 2, the translator substitutes the generic phrase for the elements of the ethical triangle. This approach illustrates adaptation, since the translator removes theoretically complex words like *aqyl* in favor of cultural clarity and readability for TL. This translation fits the definition of cultural substitution given by Baker as the process of replacing culturally marked phrases with ones that are functionally similar but culturally neutral. The SL's exact moral imagery is flattened, bit the sentence's general message is maintained.

Both translators chose "wise" as the functional equivalent of *aqyl*, indicating a shared understanding of its cognitive function. However, both versions simplify or omit the other parts of the message.

The example presented in *Word 41* of the *Book of words* (Table 5) illustrates how the given concept is interpreted as an enlightening and reformative force.

Table 5. *Aqyl* as Enlightening: comparative rendering in English translations.

Source Language	Target Language (Version 1)	Target Language (Version 2)	Target Language (Version 3)
Қазаққа ақыл берем, түзеймін деп қам жеген адамға екі нәрсе керек [Qazaqqa aqyl berem, tüzeimін dep qam jegen adamğa eki nārse kerek] ^[21] .	Anyone who plans <i>on teaching</i> and reforming the Kazakh must possess two advantages (Translated by R. McKayn) ^[21] .	Anyone who is anxious to reform and <i>instruct</i> the Kazakh people should possess two qualities (Translated by S. Geoghegan) ^[22] .	Anyone who would <i>edify</i> and <i>enlighten</i> the Kazakh people must possess two virtues (Translated by J. Burnside) ^[1] .

In this passage, the phrase *aqyl beru* (to give reason) is used in a culturally and socially significant context. It expresses the sharing of knowing and a more profound meaning: intellectual and moral leadership of the country. In this sense, *aqyl* is not just a fixed mental ability but rather a dynamic, dialogic process of thinking that has moral significance in the process of social change. There are four different equivalents in given renditions as "teaching", "instructing", "enlightening" and "edifying".

In analysis of three renditions, McKayn (Version 1) translates it as "teaching", using functional equivalence strategy that simplifies the ST into a more neutral TT verb. In contrast to *aqyl beru*, which frequently implies moral guidance, wisdom-sharing and collective accountability, teaching in English can entail the straightforward transfer of knowledge. The given variant aligns with a domesticating strategy that prioritizes readability but lacks the conceptual transfer.

The translator (Version 2) chooses "instruct", which is a little more formal and possibly more like to *beru* in the sense of imposition or delivery, again uses functional equivalence. The overall tone of the sentence is elevated; however, translation still lacks the ethical nuance.

Burnside (Version 3) chooses the phrase "edify and enlighten", which elevates morality and intelligence and is arguably the most ideologically aligned with Abai's goals. This is a clear application of conceptual transfer, as it conveys the purpose and function of the concept in the author's discourse rather than attempting a literal substitution. Al-Ghazali notes that enlightenment is when people free themselves from a condition where they let others guide their thinking, even though they could think independently; they just haven't had the courage to do so ^[3].

As this case shows, the translation of *aqyl*, especially when tied to themes of pedagogy and national reform, requires careful attention to both its pragmatic function,

translators faced challenges as how to balance semantic precision, philosophical nuance and target language readability. From the standpoint of TL, translators prioritize intelligibility over cultural conceptual faithfulness and communicative translation. More culturally sensitive approach, such explication or gloss translation, would have

added a comment or kept the lexical item a succinct explanation (e.g., *offer aqyl* – reasoning or advice) to preserve the meaning.

Another example from *Word 21* (Table 6) highlights how concept *aqyl* is intertwined with ethical and moral qualities.

Table 6. *Aqyl* as Moral Intelligence: comparative rendering in English translations.

Source Language	Target Language (Version 1)	Target Language (Version 2)	Target Language (Version 3)
Бұл мінез – ақылдылардың, арлылардың, артықтардың мінезі [Bül minez – aqyldylardyń, arlylardyń, artyqtardyń minezi] ^[21] .	This quality is peculiar to a man of conscience, <i>reasonable</i> and <i>high-minded</i> (Translated by R. McKayn) ^[21] .	This is a quality of the <i>most intelligent</i> , honest and best of men (Translated by S. Geoghegan) ^[22] .	You find this spirit among the sincerely <i>high-minded</i> and those who endeavour to maintain a sense of propriety and honour (Translated by J. Burnside) ^[1] .

Abai scholar M. Myrzakhmetov asserts that the concept of *aqyl* in author's thought stems from the poet's understanding of the mind as a synthesis of the divine attributes of power and knowledge, which together constitute the central concept among the eight attributes of Allah. Abai unites these two fundamental attributes under the concept of "*aqyl*"^[23]. Consequently, human comprehension of Allah is inherently limited, our intellect and scientific knowledge are finite, whereas divine truth is infinite and ultimately beyond the grasp of human reason.

The translator (Version 1) renders *aqyldy* as *reasonable*, which conveys the SL's rational quality. Similarly, *arly* becomes "a man of conscience", which is an acceptable functional equivalent, and *artyq* as "high-minded", suggesting elevated thinking or nobility of the purpose. This version minimizes the SL's emphasis on different moral kinds, by using semantic compression to reduce the structure to a single noun phrase in favor of colloquial reading.

Aqyldy is translated as "the most intelligent" to implement domesticating plan (Version 2). This places high priority on cognitive capacity for readers. Translator's simplification method, which aims to convey the term's purpose in context, represents functional equivalency.

By using an interpretative approach, the translator (Version 3) offers a philosophically reframed version of the sentence. He combines the terms *aqyl*, *ar* and *artyq* into a single description of noble character rather than providing separate translations for each. This is a strong example of conceptual transfer and foreignization, as it prioritizes the deeper philosophical meaning over lexical fidelity.

Abai's poem *Masgút* is a narrative-didactic work inspired by Eastern literary and Persian-Turkic tales. The poem contrasts rationality and moral discipline with ignorance and passion, portraying how the loss of *aqyl* results in chaos and the downfall of both rulers and common people (Table 7).

Table 7. *Aqyl* as the Loss of Rationality: comparative rendering in English translations.

Source Language	Target Language (Version 1)	Target Language (Version 2)
"Хан мен уәзір ақылдан айрылыпты, өлтірейік екеуін, жынды екен", - деп ["Han men uázir aqyldan airylypty, óltireiik ekeuin, jyndy eken", - dep] ^[19] .	The Khan and Vizier are <i>surely mad</i> , before there's mischief done, let's kill them both (Translated by D. Rottenberg) ^[24] .	"The khan and the vizier <i>are mad</i> , not us! Let's kill these lunatics!" they cried (Translated by G. Khalyk) ^[1] .

This example presents the phrase *aqyldan ayrilu* is a culturally expressive idiom used to indicate a loss of rationality or mental control. In Kazakh, *to lose aqyl* is not only to become irrational, but to deviate from ethical governance or societal responsibility.

According to Zhanuzakov's dictionary, *aqyly auysty* – lost his/her mind, went insane; *aqylynan adasty (tandy)* –

a) went mad, became mentally deranged; b) was at a loss, became confused and did not know what to do^[10].

In Version 1 of translation, the given phrase is rendered as "are surely mad", which applies a cultural substitution strategy, using a target-language idiom that is clear and emotionally strong. The phrase "before there's mischief done" does not exist in the ST, so it is an additive

strategy, possibly to clarify the motive for violence, but it shifts the focus from judgment to outcome. The strategy aligns with domestication, where cultural and linguistic unfamiliarity is minimized in favor of impact and clarity.

Version 2 similarly translates the given phrase as “are mad”, again using English idiomatic expression to capture the sense of derangement. It carries a functional equivalence, because it conveys how the characters perceive irrationality. The addition “not us!” is a rhetorical flourish that intensifies the binary opposition and adds dramatic contrast though not present in the ST, it captures the psychological state and group dynamics at play. The phrase “these

lunatics” for *jyndy eken* reflects amplified colloquialism.

Both translations rely on idiomatic and culturally familiar expressions, ensuring readability and dramatic effect. This case further illustrates the methodological challenge of translating conceptual idioms that bridge reason and cultural philosophy.

The example from poem *The Heart is a Sea* (Table 8) illustrates the dynamic and sometimes contradictory nature of *aqyl* when it becomes fragmented or externally exposed. In this context, the author portrays *aqyl* not as true wisdom but as conflicting, superficial advice that leads to confusion.

Table 8. *Aqyl* as Conflicting Counsel: comparative rendering in English translations.

Source Language	Target Language (Version 1)	Target Language (Version 2)
Шаруаң үшін көрінген ақыл айтып , жолың тайғақ, аяғың тартар маймақ [Шаруаң üşin көрінген aqyl aıtyp, jolyn taıǵaq, aıaǵyn tartar maimaq] ^[19] .	He has to attend to conflicting advice , wavering, faltering, timid and tame (Translated by D. Rottenberg) ^[24] .	Gives different advice , and so the road, grows difficult, and you will lose your way (Translated by R. Kudabayeva) ^[1] .

The line uses *aqyl aity* literally translates as “giving advice”, but its semantic meaning is derived from the profoundly held the concept *aqyl* as sage guidance based on moral consciousness and sound judgment. Giving *aqyl* in traditional Kazakh culture denotes having moral authority and intellectual maturity. Here, Abai criticizes a situation in which anyone (*köringen*, or “whoever appears”) dares to offer *aqyl*, regardless of their qualifications or level of knowledge. The imagery of a slippery path reinforces the theme of confusion and moral disorientation caused by conflicting or superficial advice. *Aqyl*’s power is diminished by this democratization or devaluation, which also causes personal confusion (*jolyn taıǵaq* – your road becomes slippery).

In Version 1, *aqyl aity* is translated as “conflicting advice”, representing a descriptive and functional equivalence. This captures the multiplicity and contradiction implied by unsolicited advice but omits the poetic metaphor embedded in the Kazakh original. The physical imagery of “your road becomes slippery” and “your steps become clumsy” is compressed into adjectives like “wavering”, “faltering”, and “timid”. While this results in a fluent English sentence, it represents a case of cultural reduction.

Version 2 preserves more of the original metaphorical structure. While “gives different advice” is a relatively rendering of *aqyl aityp*, it retains the idea of multiple voic-

es and thus represents functional equivalence. This variant better conveys the causal relationship in Abai’s line – how receiving advice from various (possibly unqualified) sources can disorient one’s moral or life path.

In the definition provided by the Oxford Dictionary, *aqyl* gives another equivalent as “advice” in this example^[17]. As stated in Dictionary of the Kazakh language: *aqyl aıty (berdi, qosty)* – gave advice, instructed^[10].

Word 38 is one of the most insightful and socially critical pieces in Abai’s *Book of words* that reflects the author’s broader moral philosophy. In the next example, Abai combines irony and metaphor, particularly the “bazar” image, to expose the social roots of vanity and self-deception in the society of his time (Table 9). He describes those who flaunt their intelligence merely to gain admiration, comparing them to merchants displaying themselves in a marketplace.

This example demonstrates the challenges of translating *aqyl*-based idioms, especially when paired with embodied metaphors. The phrase *aqyly közindegi* is a concise construct in Kazakh, combining cognition (*aqyl*) with the organ of perception (*köz*) to create a satirical evaluation of shallow thinking.

In the SL, the phrase *aqyly közindegi* can be literally rendered as “whose intellect is in their eyes”. This expression in Kazakh describing individuals who judge

by appearances and lack true reasoning. It draws on the metaphor that the seat of thought is misplaced – in the eyes rather than the mind – implying superficiality, vanity, and an inability to think critically.

Table 9. *Aqyl* as Superficial Intellect: comparative rendering in English translations.

Source Language	Target Language (Version 1)	Target Language (Version 2)	Target Language (Version 3)
Бұл істерінің бәрі өзін көрсетпек, өзін-өзі базарға салып, бір ақылы көзіндегі ақымақтарға «бәрекелді» дегізбек. Bül ısterınıñ bärı özin körsetpek, özin-özi bazarğa salyp, bır aqyly közindegi aqymaqtarğa «bärekeldı» degızbek ^[21] .	Such persons are eager to show off, as if they were in the marketplace, and they arouse envy amongst fools whose wits are only in their eyes (Translated by R. McKayn) ^[21] .	All their deeds and endeavors are merely the desire to stand out from crowd, to put themselves on display like goods on a stall at the bazaar and to be thrilled if some fool with but one thought in his head compliments him saying: “Well done! Good man!” (Translated by S. Geoghegan) ^[22] .	They strive to look good, to sell themselves to a public as cattle are sold at market (Translated by J. Burnside) ^[1] .

Following Amanzholov and Aryngazina, open one’s eyes (*közin ashı*) – to understand (to reach mutual understanding, to teach, to offer advice) ^[25].

In Version 1, translator uses metaphorical translation “fools whose wits are only in their eyes” combined with dynamic equivalence. This version retains metaphor, allowing the target audience to access the figurative concept without heavy explanation. The phrase wits are only in their eyes is unusual but intelligible, and it aligns with the author’s moral critique.

The Version 2 of translation uses idiomatic substitution and semantic simplification at the same time. The focus shifts from the metaphor of the eyes to a more generic image of a fool with limited intellect. While it reads more fluently in English, it erases the cultural-metaphorical structure of the phrase. The vivid image of misplaced intellect is replaced with a conventional idiom that softens Abai’s satirical tone.

There is no direct equivalent in Version 3, so zero equivalence – the phrase is not rendered. This omission results in a loss of culturally important cognitive metaphor.

5. Conclusions

The distribution of translation strategies for the concept *aqyl* presented in **Figure 2** is based on the corpus of 35 selected examples drawn from both author’s Book of Words and poetry.

The analysis reflects the strategies that the translators adopted in their English renderings. Literal or direct translations, such as *mind*, *reason*, *intellect*, and *intelligence*, constitute the largest proportion (39%). These are followed by functional equivalence (20%), where *aqyl*

rendered by terms like *wisdom*, *wise* or *sage*, and conceptual transfer (12%), which involves a shift into related but culturally or ethically reframed domains, for example *conscience*, *soundness of mind*, or *keen-eyed sage*. Explanatory or paraphrastic renderings (17%), where *aqyl* translated as *counsel*, *advice*, *teaching*, or *vessel*, and metaphorical or poetic strategies (9%), also appear with notable frequency as *mind/intellect is cold as ice*, *your minds grow dull*, *clouds their reason*, while omissions or semantic shifts are rare (3%). The corpus was constructed to include a balanced range of examples, ensuring that the proportions are not arbitrary but indicative of consistent patterns. The present results are sufficiently robust to highlight dominant strategies and to support the conclusions drawn. Overall, as demonstrated by the **Figure 2**, the distribution of strategies reveals that while most translators focused on accessibility and communicative clarity, fewer actively engaged with the cultural and cognitive dimensions that make *aqyl* a uniquely layered concept in the author’s writing system.

A noteworthy pattern emerged when comparing translations produced by Kazakh translators and native English translators. Kazakh translators tended to demonstrate greater sensitivity to the philosophical and cultural implications of *aqyl*. Their renderings, while sometimes less idiomatic in English, more consistently reflected the internal logic of Abai’s worldview. In contrast, native English-speaking translators generally prioritized fluency, stylistic cohesion, and idiomatic expression, which sometimes led to a reduction in conceptual depth.

The findings indicate that in poetic and philosophical contexts, *aqyl* functions as more than intellect. In several cases, the moral-evaluative dimension of the concept was weakened or omitted entirely in translation.

While some versions demonstrated awareness of metaphorical structure and socio-ethical context, others employed simplification or semantic compression, resulting in partial loss of meaning. Translations that retained metaphor (e.g., “slippery path”, “losing reason”) or used elevated diction (e.g. “edify and enlighten”) were more successful in approximating the cognitive and ethical force of the original term. Moreover, the comparative data suggest that cultural substitution was often used in translating *aqyl*-related expressions, especially in socially charged texts.

The findings highlight the translator’s tendency to prefer literal renderings while also revealing that a significant number of cases involve interpretative strategies that expand or reframe the semantic field of the given concept. A larger corpus, encompassing Abai’s complete works and additional translations, would allow for more representative results and help to test whether the observed tendencies are systematic or largely text specific.

In conclusion, the study confirms that the translation of the concept *aqyl* cannot be limited to cognitive or rationalist terminology. Its meaning emerges through its relational positioning in Abai’s ethical system. Therefore, the translation of concept *aqyl* requires a method that combines functional equivalence, metaphorical translation or conceptual transfer. By doing so, translators may better preserve both the semantic content and cultural depth of author’s intellectual legacy. Future perspectives highlight the necessity of expanding this research into comparative translation studies of other culturally embedded intellectual concepts in Abai and beyond. Examining *aqyl* alongside related notions in Turkic, Islamic, and Western traditions can help chart a broader map of conceptual transfer across languages. Future research could investigate how *aqyl* interacts with concepts of wisdom (*hikmah*), intellect (*‘aql*), or rational morality in Kantian philosophy, thereby positioning Abai’s thought within a wider global philosophical conversation. Additionally, comparative work with other Central Asian poets and thinkers would deepen for understanding of how shared concepts travel and transform in translation. Such inquiries not only refine our grasp of the author’s intellectual heritage but also contribute to global translation studies.

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