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The Impact of Linguistic Identity on the Perception of Abai's Poetry

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the influence of linguistic identity on the perception of the poetry of Abai Kunanbayev, one of the greatest Kazakh poets, is examined. The primary objective of the research is to identify differences in the perception of poetry among representatives of various linguistic groups. The introduction includes a review of existing research and theoretical approaches to studying the influence of linguistic identity on literary perception. The research methods involve surveying and interviewing respondents with different linguistic identities. The sample consisted of 200 participants divided into two linguistic groups: native Kazakh speakers (100 participants), and native Russian speakers (100 participants) with a high linguistic level in the Kazakh language. Data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods, including statistical tests and thematic analysis. The results of the study indicate that linguistic identity significantly affects the emotional and cognitive perception of Abai's poetry. Native Kazakh speakers demonstrate deeper emotional engagement and a better understanding of the cultural and historical aspects of Abai's works compared to speakers of other languages. The discussion of the results addresses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. The main conclusions emphasize the importance of considering linguistic identity when studying literary perception, and recommendations are provided for educators and cultural scholars. The article concludes with a review of the limitations of the research and suggestions for future studies in this field.

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1. Introduction

Every nation and every civilization has its founding values. On this basis, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Abai Kunanbayev is at the forefront of the national, spiritual, and cultural values of Kazakh society.

Abai Kunanbayev, a recognized classic of Kazakh literature, holds a special place in Kazakhstan's cultural heritage. His poetry, reflecting the depth of philosophical thought and the richness of Kazakh culture, has a unique ability to unite people of various nationalities and generations. However, the perception of Abai's poetry can vary significantly depending on the reader's linguistic identity. In the context of globalization and linguistic diversity, studying the influence of linguistic identity on literary perception becomes especially relevant.

The relevance of this topic is driven by the growing interest in intercultural communication and the understanding of how linguistic affiliation shapes our cognitive and emotional responses to literary works. The perception of poetry, as an art form, is deeply connected with linguistic features that can influence text interpretation, emotional response, and cultural perception.

This study aims to identify the influence of linguistic identity on the perception of Abai's poetry. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were set:

1. To investigate how speakers of different languages perceive Abai's poetry.
2. To determine which aspects of the poetry elicit the strongest emotional and cognitive reactions among representatives of various linguistic groups.
3. To compare the perception of Abai's poetry between native Kazakh speakers and speakers of other languages.

A literature review indicates that existing studies in linguistics and psychology pay significant attention to the influence of language on cognitive processes and emotional perception. Works dedicated to Abai's creativity mainly focus on his literary achievements and cultural significance, but little attention has been given to studying the perception of his poetry by different linguistic groups.

Based on this, the research hypothesis was formulated: linguistic identity significantly influences the perception of Abai's poetry, with native Kazakh speakers demonstrating deeper understanding and emotional involvement compared to speakers of other languages.

This study attempts to fill this gap in the literature by providing data that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of language in shaping literary perception and enrich practical approaches to teaching and popularizing Kazakh literature.

2. Literature Review

The investigation of the influence of linguistic identity on the perception of literary works is a significant topic in the fields of linguistics and cultural studies. The perception of literature, particularly poetry, is closely connected to the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the reader^[1].

The perception of a literary work allows for different interpretations depending on the life experience of the reader, his general preparation and knowledge, perception and imagination, value (historical and cultural), and positions, and shows the relevance of reading a literary text^[2, 3].

The language encapsulates socio-historical experiences—both universal and national—resulting in a dual process: (1) The living conditions and the material world surrounding individuals shape their consciousness and behavior, which are reflected in language, primarily in semantics and grammatical forms. (2) Individuals perceive the world predominantly through the forms of their native language, which determines human structures of thought and behavior^[4].

According to the "Dictionary of Sociolinguistic Terms", "linguistic identity (from Latin *identicus*, meaning identical) is the individual's awareness (self-consciousness, self-identification, self-determination) of their belonging to a language; a set of linguistic characteristics of an individual or group, comprising language knowledge, language use, and attitudes toward languages"^[5]. Following this definition, in this study, linguistic identity is defined as proficiency in a language at a high level, akin to a native language.

Numerous studies confirm that linguistic identity plays

a significant role in the process of perceiving and interpreting literary texts. Cross-cultural research indicates that speakers of different languages may perceive the same literary works differently due to variations in linguistic structures, cultural contexts, and cognitive schemas. Humboldt believed that much of an individual's perception of the world is determined by their language. He argued that each language creates boundaries for its speakers, and they can only break free from these boundaries by learning a new language^[6].

The emotional perception of poetry is also heavily influenced by linguistic identity. The language in which a reader engages with a poetic text can either amplify or diminish their emotional response^[7, 8]. Research shows that native speakers experience stronger emotions and emotional involvement when reading poetry in their native language compared to translated texts^[9-11].

The works of Abai Kunanbayev, being deeply rooted in cultural and historical contexts, are perceived differently by speakers of various languages. Native Kazakh speakers exhibit deeper emotional and cognitive engagement with their poetry compared to speakers of other languages. This study aims to broaden the understanding of these differences and contribute to the fields of linguistics and cultural studies by providing new insights into the influence of linguistic identity on the perception of literary works.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and Participants

The study was conducted among 200 participants, divided into two groups based on their native language: native Kazakh speakers (100 participants), and native Russian speakers (100 participants) with a high linguistic level in the Kazakh language. Participants were selected from various age groups and educational levels to ensure sample diversity. The main inclusion criteria were age between 18 and 60 years (the age criterion was limited to 60 years as this is a socially active age category); ability to read and understand poetry in their native language; consent to participate in the study.

3.2. Data Collection

Data were collected using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires included both

closed and open-ended questions aimed at assessing the perception of Abai's poetry. The questionnaire was designed to address emotional, cognitive, and cultural aspects of perception. Questions included: "How do you assess the emotional impact of Abai's poetry?", "What cultural elements do you find most significant in his poetry?", "How do you evaluate your understanding of the read text?"

Interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of individual perceptions and included questions about personal impressions of Abai's poetry and their interpretation of cultural and historical contexts.

3.3. Procedure

The research procedure encompassed several stages: Initially, participants were recruited via social media, universities, and cultural centers. The questionnaire and interview questions were developed and tested for reliability and validity. During the main stage, surveys were administered to all participants in both paper and electronic formats. Each group was provided with original texts in Kazakh and Russian translation to read and listen to. After reading the poetry, participants completed a questionnaire assessing their emotions, understanding of the text, cultural identification, and the impact of the poetry on personal perception. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants from each linguistic group to gather more detailed qualitative data. In the final stage, data were collected and systematically organized, checked for completeness and accuracy, and then prepared for analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used for data analysis. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods (means, standard deviations) (e.g., Equations (1) and (2))^[12] for a general description of the sample. Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which included the following steps:

1. Transcribing interviews.
2. Coding data to identify key themes and categories.
3. Analyzing and interpreting data in the context of the research hypothesis.

4. Results

4.1. Sample Description

The sample consisted of 200 participants divided into two linguistic groups: native Kazakh speakers (100 participants), and native Russian speakers (100 participants) with a high linguistic level in the Kazakh language. The average age of participants was 34.5 years, with 56% being women and 44% men. Educational levels varied from secondary to higher education, with a predominance of participants having higher education (65%).

4.2. Key Findings

Native Kazakh speakers demonstrated a higher level of emotional engagement when reading Abai's poetry ($M = 4.7$, $SD = 0.5$) compared to native Russian speakers ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.7$). The differences between groups were statistically significant ($F(2, 97) = 15.67$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, native Kazakh speakers showed higher results in understanding the cultural and historical aspects of the poetry ($M = 4.8$, $SD = 0.4$) compared to native Russian speakers ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.6$). The differences between groups were statistically significant ($F(2, 97) = 10.85$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, native Kazakh speakers rated the cultural elements of Abai's poetry as more significant ($M = 4.9$, $SD = 0.3$) compared to native Russian speakers ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.5$). The differences between groups were statistically significant ($F(2, 97) = 12.34$, $p < 0.001$).

4.3. Qualitative Analysis of Interview Data

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed several key themes: Native Kazakh speakers frequently mentioned feelings of pride and patriotism when reading Abai's poetry. "Reading Abai evokes a deep sense of connection to my roots and culture," said one participant. They also noted that knowledge of Kazakhstan's history and culture helps them better understand and interpret Abai's poetry. "Each of Abai's poems is like a small lesson in history and philosophy for me," shared one participant. In contrast, native Russian speakers highlighted difficulties in understanding some cultural and historical aspects of Abai's poetry, which are lost in translation. "The translation doesn't always convey all the nuances and depth of the original text," noted one participant.

Despite these differences, all participants, regardless of linguistic identity, expressed admiration for Abai's talent and his contribution to world literature. "His poetry is something unique and universal, which resonates in the hearts of people of different nationalities," said one participant.

Let's examine the perception of Abai's poem "*Qalyn elim, qazagym, qairan zhurty*" among Kazakh-speaking and Russian-speaking individuals. Here is one of the translations (into Russian by U. Kusnetcov, into English by Dorian Rottenberg) and interpretations of some couplets of this verse:

The first couplet:

Qalyn elim, qazagym, qairan zhurty,
Ustarasyz auzyna tusti murtyn.
Zhaksy menen zhamandy aiymady,
Biri qan, biri mai bop eki urty (original text).

"*Qalyn elim, qazagym, qairan zhurty*" (Oh, my luckless Kazakh, my unfortunate kin) – words expressing Abai's love and concern for his people. The phrase "*qalyn elim*" shows the large number of people, the word "*qazagym*" means national unity, and the phrase "*qairan zhurty*" shows the difficult situation of the people. "*Ustarasyz auzyna tusti murtyn*" (An unkempt moustache hides your mouth and chin) – this metaphor refers to the ignorance and shortcomings of the people. An unshaven mustache is a symbol of unpreparedness, indifference. "*Zhaksy menen zhamandy aiymady*" (Your looks are not bad and your numbers are vast) – people's inability to distinguish between right and wrong, loss of moral values. "*Biri qan, biri mai bop eki urty*" (Your looks are not bad and your numbers are vast) – This is what they say about a person in whom opposite qualities coexist. Depending on the circumstances, he can be good, and evil, and fickle, and faithful, and cunning, and straightforward. The first couplet is understood differently by the two groups. Kazakh speakers see a wise man in this image, and Russian speakers see a greedy man. This is possible because the direct translation into Russian would be something like "This unshaven savage so greedily and ferociously devour the meat of the ram he has just slaughtered that blood and fat congeal mixed on his cheeks".

The second couplet:

Ozimdiki dei almaï oz malyndy,
Kundiz kulkin buzyldy, tuned uiqyn.

Korseqyzar keledi bailauy zhok,
Bir kun tyrtyn etedi, bir kun bultyn.

“*Ozimdiki dei almai oz malyndy*” (Unable to manage your property) – people’s inability to use their property properly. “*Kundiz kulkin buzylady, tuned uiqyn*” (Day and night, care and worry are all you see) – difficulty of life, lack of peace. “*Korseqyzar keledi bailauy zhok*” (Constant is naught but inconstancy) – people’s lack of control, lack of discipline. “*Bir kun tyrtyn etedi, bir kun bultyn*” (Now haughty, now wearing a look of offence) – instability, one day fun, one day sad life. The second couplet also is perceived differently by the two groups. Native Kazakh speakers see injustice to the people, they have compassion for them. And Russian speakers assess the people as irresponsible, inept, and fickle.

The third couplet:

Bas-basyna bi bolgan onkei qiqym,
Mineki buzgan zhok pa eldin siqyn?
Ozderindi tuzeler dei almaimyn,
Oz qolynnan ketken son endi oz yrkyn.

“*Bas-basyna bi bolgan onkei qiqym*” (All sorts of scurvy, and petty scum) - everyone wants to be the boss despite their abilities, “*Mineki buzgan zhok pa eldin siqyn?*” (Have crippled your soul for years to come) - the destruction of the unity of the people, “*Ozderindi tuzeler dei almaimyn*” (No hope of improvement have you until) - there is no hope that the people themselves will correct their situation, “*Oz qolynnan ketken son endi oz yrkyn*” (Master of your fate you become) - the fate of the people is in the hands of another people. The third couplet also is perceived differently by the two groups. Native Kazakh speakers felt compassion, while Russian speakers expressed incomprehension at the people’s inaction.

The fourth couplet:

Agaiyn zhok narseden eter burtyyn,
Onyn da algan zhok pa Qudai qulqyn.
Birlik zhok, bereke zhok, shyn peiil zhok,
Sypyryldy bailygyn, baqqan zhylykyn.

“*Agaiyn zhok narseden eter burtyyn*” (Kinsmen for trifles each other hate) – discord between relatives over trifles, “*Onyn da algan zhok pa Qudai qulqyn*” (God bereft them of reason – such is their fate) – spiritual immorality of the people, “*Birlik zhok, bereke zhok, shyn peiil zhok*” (No hon-

our, no harmony, only dissent) - loss of friendship and unity, “*Sypyryldy bailygyn, baqqan zhylykyn*” (No wonder cattle is scarcer of late) - impoverishment of the people and loss of everything valuable. The forth couplet is also understood differently by the two groups. Kazakh speakers noted spiritual immorality and were upset by the discord between relatives. And Russian speakers pointed out more material loss, emphasizing the poverty of the people.

4.4. Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis focuses on the differences in emotional and cognitive engagement with Abai’s poetry among native Kazakh speakers and native Russian speakers. This analysis helps to understand how linguistic identity influences the perception and appreciation of literary works, specifically poetry.

4.5. Emotional Engagement

Mean emotional engagement scores indicate that native Kazakh speakers ($M = 4.7$, $SD = 0.5$) exhibit significantly higher emotional engagement when reading Abai’s poetry compared to native Russian speakers ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.7$). This finding was supported by statistical analysis, which showed significant differences between the groups ($F(2, 97) = 15.67$, $p < 0.001$). The higher emotional engagement among native Kazakh speakers can be attributed to their deep cultural connection and familiarity with the historical context of Abai’s works.

4.6. Cognitive Perception and Understanding

Mean cognitive understanding scores indicate that native Kazakh speakers ($M = 4.8$, $SD = 0.4$) demonstrated superior cognitive understanding of the cultural and historical nuances in Abai’s poetry compared to native Russian speakers ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.6$). The statistical analysis revealed significant differences between the groups ($F(2, 97) = 10.85$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that native Kazakh speakers’ familiarity with their own cultural and historical background enables them to grasp and appreciate the deeper meanings and contexts within Abai’s poetry more effectively than their peers from other linguistic backgrounds.

4.7. Cultural Elements and Significance

Mean scores for cultural elements significance show that native Kazakh speakers ($M = 4.9$, $SD = 0.3$) rated these elements as more significant compared to native Russian speakers ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.5$). The statistical analysis confirmed significant differences between the groups ($F(2, 97) = 12.34$, $p < 0.001$). This result highlights the intrinsic connection that native Kazakh speakers have with the cultural references and themes in Abai's poetry, enhancing their appreciation and understanding of his work.

4.8. Interview Insights

The qualitative data from interviews provided further depth to the comparative analysis. Native Kazakh speakers frequently expressed a strong sense of pride and connection to their cultural heritage when discussing Abai's poetry. They described how Abai's works evoke a deep emotional response and a sense of patriotism. In contrast, native Russian speakers often mentioned difficulties in fully comprehending some of the cultural and historical references in Abai's poetry, which can be attributed to the limitations of translations and their lack of personal connection to Kazakh culture.

Despite these challenges, participants from all linguistic backgrounds recognized and admired Abai's literary talent and his universal themes. This cross-cultural appreciation underscores the universal appeal of Abai's poetry, while also highlighting the unique depth of connection experienced by native Kazakh speakers.

4.9. Summary of Comparative Findings

Native Kazakh speakers show the highest levels of emotional engagement, followed by native Russian speakers, showing the lowest levels. They also demonstrate the highest cognitive understanding of cultural and historical aspects, with native Russian speakers showing progressively lower levels of understanding. Additionally, native Kazakh speakers rate cultural elements as more significant compared to other groups, highlighting their intrinsic connection to the cultural context of the poetry. Interview insights reveal that native Kazakh speakers express strong feelings of pride and cultural connection, while other groups note challenges in translation and cultural comprehension, yet all appreciate

Abai's literary genius. These findings validate the hypothesis that linguistic identity significantly influences the perception of Abai's poetry, with native Kazakh speakers experiencing a deeper and more nuanced appreciation of his work.

4.10. Mean and Standard Deviation

In the context of statistical analysis, "M" and "SD" stand for "Mean" and "Standard Deviation," respectively. These are key measures used to describe the distribution of data. The mean (M) tells us the average level of a certain measure (e.g., emotional engagement). The standard deviation (SD) tells us how much the values vary around the mean, providing insight into the consistency of responses.

The mean, often denoted as "M", is the average of a set of numbers. It is calculated by summing all the values in a dataset and then dividing by the number of values. The mean provides a central value for the dataset.

$$M = \sum * x_I / N \quad (1)$$

Where: $\sum * x_I$ is the sum of all values in the dataset. N is the number of values in the dataset.

The standard deviation, often denoted as "SD", measures the amount of variation or dispersion in a set of values. A low standard deviation indicates that the values tend to be close to the mean, while a high standard deviation indicates that the values are spread out over a wider range.

$$SD = \sqrt{(\sum * (x_I - M)^2) / N} \quad (2)$$

Where: x_I is each value in the dataset; M is the mean of the dataset; N is the number of values in the dataset.

5. Discussion

The study confirms the hypothesis that native Kazakh speakers exhibit a deeper emotional engagement when reading Abai's poetry compared to speakers of the Russian language. This can be attributed to the fact that Kazakh is the native language of these participants, and Abai's poetry is intrinsically linked to their cultural and historical identity. As noted, language plays a crucial role in shaping emotional responses to literary works^[7, 8, 12].

Native Kazakh speakers also demonstrated a better understanding of the cultural and historical aspects of Abai's poetry. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Yessym^[9],

which suggest that cultural heritage and historical knowledge contribute to a deeper literary perception. Based on the main principles of hermeneutics, Kazakh philosopher, Yessym, in his work “Hakim Abai” examines the works of the great poet not only as an individual literary phenomenon but also in the context of the historical period that created it, in the context of great cultural traditions^[13]. Kazakh-speaking participants were better able to interpret metaphors, symbols, and cultural references in Abai’s poetry, highlighting the importance of cultural context for cognitive perception.

Russian speakers face difficulties in perceiving Abai’s poetry even having the translation of the original text in hand, supporting the conclusions, about the loss of nuances and cultural meanings in translation^[14–16]. Translating poetry is a complex process that may not fully convey all aspects of the original text, making it challenging for readers to fully perceive and interpret the works. Having a high level of language proficiency, they do not fully comprehend the original text.

The findings support theoretical concepts regarding the significance of linguistic identity and cultural context in literary perception. They confirm that language not only serves as a means of communication but also shapes cognitive and emotional responses to literature. This is consistent with a theory, which emphasizes the role of language in aesthetic perception^[7, 17, 18].

The data obtained have practical significance for educators and cultural professionals involved in promoting Kazakh literature. Understanding the influence of linguistic identity on the perception of poetry can aid in developing effective teaching and translation methodologies. For instance, educators might incorporate additional cultural and historical materials to provide students with a deeper understanding of Abai’s works.

5.1. Limitations of the Study

Despite the significance of the results, the study has several limitations. The sample size, though consisting of 200 participants, may not be sufficiently representative to generalize findings across all linguistic groups and age categories. Additionally, geographic limitations, as participants were primarily from one region (West Kazakhstan), may restrict the applicability of the results to other cultural and geographic contexts. Furthermore, the methodology, which

relied on questionnaires and interviews, has inherent limitations such as the subjectivity of responses and potential data distortion due to social desirability bias.

5.2. Suggestions for Future Research

To expand and deepen the findings, it is suggested to increase the size and diversity of the sample, including participants from various regions and cultural contexts. Conducting longitudinal studies would help examine changes in the perception of Abai’s poetry over time. Investigating the influence of other factors, such as education level, professional activity, and personal interests, on the perception of poetry would provide a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, employing methods such as experimental studies and brain activity analysis could more accurately measure emotional and cognitive reactions.

6. Conclusions

The study confirms that linguistic identity plays a key role in the perception of Abai’s poetry. Native Kazakh speakers demonstrate deeper emotional and cognitive engagement, which is linked to their cultural and historical context. These findings underscore the importance of considering linguistic identity in literary perception studies and can be valuable for further research in linguistics and cultural studies.

Author Contributions

All researchers have contributed to this research as follows: A.B. has written introduction section and collected the data, A.S. has written the literature review, K.P. has conducted the interviews, A.P. has analyzed the data, G.M. has reviewed the paper and come up with the conclusion part.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the authors upon request. To access the data, interested parties should contact the corresponding author. Please note that while the data are not publicly accessible, they can be provided for research purposes upon reasonable request. Any restrictions and conditions on the use of the data will be communicated by the authors. This ensures that the data are used appropriately and ethically, in line with the study's objectives and confidentiality requirements.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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