

Exploring the Islamic Terminology in Kutadgu Bilig and Addressing Translation Challenges into English

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the rich Islamic vocabulary found, paying much attention to the names of Allah in Kutadgu Bilig, in a classic Turkic literary work authored by Yusuf Khass Hajib in the 11th century. Through a meticulous examination of linguistic nuances and contextual analyses, this study aims to demonstrate that Kutadgu Bilig is not merely a secular or cultural text but, in fact, a profound Islamic literary masterpiece. Drawing on linguistic evidence, historical context, and religious themes, the article establishes the presence of Islamic concepts, terminologies, and ethical guidelines within the text, shedding light on the deep integration of Islamic principles into the fabric of Kutadgu Bilig. Through this exploration, the article seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the religious dimensions of Turkic literature and the interplay between Islamic and Turkic cultural elements in the medieval Islamic world.

Keywords: Islamic elements, Turkic literature, Yusuf Khass Hajib, Kutadgu Bilig, terminology, medieval Islamic world, linguistic nuances, cultural text

INTRODUCTION

Religious translation stands apart from other translation genres, posing a distinctive level of difficulty due to its heightened requirement for precision, attentiveness, and prudence. The

primary obstacles involve navigating conceptual complexities in translation and grappling with specialized terminology. The process of translation encompasses both artistic and scientific elements. Thus, a translator is not only required to be proficient in at least two languages but also to fully utilize their skills and capabilities in order to generate translations that are not only accurate but also appropriate. Translating religious texts is infinitely more complex than translating modern secular texts due to various linguistics and religious-cultural factors [1]. Historically, our ancestors commonly incorporated religious motivations into their creations to disseminate their works across generations. This was driven by the perception that religion consistently served as a fundamental source of inspiration, influencing people's perspectives and lifestyles. Known as the significant work of Turkish medieval literature, *Kutadgu Bilig*, also known as “*Qutadgu Bilig*” or “*The Wisdom of Royal Glory*,” was influenced by the Islamic cultural and intellectual milieu of its time. During this period, the Islamic civilization had a profound impact on Central Asia, including the Turkic-speaking regions. As a result, many works of literature, including *Kutadgu Bilig*, reflected Islamic themes, values, and principles. In our research we tried to find religious terminology and Islamic motives in world famous work and tried to analyse how these words were translated by two translators Walter May and Robert Dankoff.

METHODS

Appropriate method plays a significant role in conducting a research since it involves a system of researching a particular subject. The analysis of this study is conducted by applying qualitative method. Qualitative method is a procedure in which the data is explained through descriptive sentences according to the characteristics and the nature of the data [2]. The data collection technique employed in this study is the observation method, specifically focusing on systematically observing Source Language (SL) religious terms and their corresponding translations in the Target Language (TL). The observation

method utilized a note-taking technique to gather pertinent data. Following the data collection phase, a qualitative method was employed for analysis. The choice of a qualitative method in this study is justified by the descriptive nature of both the data and the analysis. Through the application of qualitative methodology, this research systematically presents an analysis of translation procedures concerning religious terms. The data of this study was taken from “Kutadgu Bilig” by Yusuf Khas Hadjib. The translation of the book into English namely “Wisdom of Royal Glory” was done by by Robert Dankoff [3]. Another translation into English was done by Walter May [4]. These two translations were used in order to conduct our research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

“Kutadgu bilig” has been attracting world’s researchers’ attention as an old Turkic written treasure for many years. There are several research works of scientists on learning Yusuf Has Hadjib’s “Kutadgu bilig” as well as foreign scientists. First of all, as the founder scientists of Uzbek “Kutadgu bilig” school we can mention names of A. Fitrat, N. Mallayev, Q. Karimov, B. Tuhliyev, Q. Sodiqov and others. Because of these scientists’ attempts the interest is being increased to learn “Kutadgu bilig” from poetical and philological points and define its significance in the world literature.[5] Yusuf Khas Hadjib was the first to introduce the ideas of Islamic law into Turkish literature. They are: Tawhid (توحيد) (the Arabic term for the oneness of God), Nubuwwah (نبوة), kavniyot (كونيات), g‘aybiyot (غيبيات). He used all of these Islamic faith based perceptions in his bites and highly influenced to the Islamic faith among people at that time. It is also noted by J. Buriyev that Yusuf Balasaguni used 139 Ayahs from Qur’an in 152 parts of the book.[6] One of the influential Uzbek professor who works on Kutadgu bilig, Z. Sodiqov[7] states that it is very vital to do research on the names of Allah in Kutadgu bilig and their proper translation. He also states that there are also some beautiful names of Allah that is known as "Al-Asma-ul-Husna,". In his research, he states that there are 23 beautiful names of Allah. In the following we are going to

discuss some of these examples from this novel and how they were translated into English by famous translators Walter May and Robert Dankoff.

We can see these bites in Source language of Kutadgu bilig

Bayat ati birlä sözüg başladım,
Törütgän, igiðgän, keçürgäniðim (QB.120).

Meaning is that “I start my discourse with the name of God, nourisher, creator and pardoner.

We can see three adjectives which describe Allah and that refer to three beautiful names of Allah. The first one is Törütgän which is derived from old Turkish word Törüt(meaning create)+gän, which means creator. This can be clue for name of Allah **الْخَالِقُ** which is AL-KHAALIQ meaning creator and maker. Another adjective used for God is igiðgän. This word means in old Turkish that igið(to feed)gän which means someone who feed us. The equivalent of this word in Arabic is **الرزاق** meaning AR-RAZZAAQ (someone who provided us and feed us). The third adjective is keçürgän which means pardoner in old Turkish. This is the clue for the name of Allah, **al-G‘offar**. This means the Great Forgiver.

Now we have to look at the English translations of these beautiful names.

Robert Dankoff translated these bites like this:

With glory to God, I begin on my courses,
In praise of the founder of all finest forces.[3]

As we can see Robert Dankoff did not mention about these three adjectives and he used more general meaning like “Founder”. But this was translated differently by Walter May:

I began my discourse with the name of God, my Lord,
Creator, nourisher, pardoner.

As we can see Walter May could give all of those three adjectives to describe Allah by using creator, nourisher and pardoner.

From my observation, I can say that Yusuf Khas Hadjib did not use real Arabic Islamic terms. He interchanged most of them

into old Turkish version of those words. As we read through the novel, we can observe that he never used the word Alloh, instead he used “bayat”, “idim” “tenri”. Also, we cannot find some Islamic religious words in the novel like: Jannah, namaz, duzah. Instead he used words like “uchmaq” (“jannah”), “tamug” (“do‘zah”).

Another example can be seen in these bites:

"Oqus okdu birle tumān mīn sana,
Oğan bir bāyatqā ānār yoq fāna."

Here we can notice that there is one more name referring to Allah.

Oğan=O (in old Turkish means someone who is capable of everything)+ğan. The equivalent of this word in Arabic is الْقَادِرُ means AL-Qodir that's Allah's name meaning the Powerful and capable.

Another word that has taken my attention is the word “Bir” in source language. The word “Bir” is derived from old Turkish language and if we translate this into Arabic the translation will be واحد means “wahid”. From this we can get a refer to another name of Allah in the novel. That is Al-Waahid meaning the One, He is Alone and He is Unique in every single way! Now we have to check translation of these lines into English.

Countless praises to the Almighty one,
who does not pass away.[3]

Robert Dankoff translated like above and used the word THE ALMIGHTY. In Cambridge online dictionary [8] the definition for this word is the following: *powerful usually used for describing God*. We can see that Robert Dankoff could understand the real meaning of those bites and could translate well. Now we have to check another translation by Walter May:

His praises and glory are ever-increasing,
The Lord is Almighty, his power never ceasing. [4]

As we can see Walter May could also do his best in order to give the real meaning which was intended to be given in the source language. He also used “The Lord is Almighty, his power never ceasing”. But in both English translations we cannot find any equivalence for the word “Al-Waahid” which was intended to be given by the word “bir” in source text.

Another issue can be seen in line 3246 of this novel:

Turub yundi qildi bu yatg‘u namaz
Toshek quldi yatti udib bardi az.

Here the writer meant about being pure before praying, and he meant about taharah which muslims do before worshipping. In order to clarify this issue better, we will look through the definitions of taharah in Islamic life. “Taharah” means purification from all minor and major cleanliness of body and soul as well. Taharah means being ready for worshipping.

In the translation by Walter May [4] these lines can be seen as:

He washed himself well, and his prayers then he said
He ordered his bed, and he laid down his head.

We can witness that translator used too general word in order to explain taharah, He used the word “wash” which cannot express real Islamic meaning of taharah. Robert Dankoff translated the following:

He rose to perform his ablutions and bedtime prayer,
Then called for bedding and lay down to sleep a little.

Robert dankoff came a little closer than Walter May by using the word *bedtime prayer* and *perform ablution*. In Cambridge dictionary [9] ablution is defined as the act of washing yourself: Ablution is part of some religious ceremonies.

Another example can be seen in the following lines:

“Qamug‘ qadg‘usi erdi ummat uchun,
Qutulmaq tiler erdi rahat uchun”
(all his care was for his Ummah , he wished their salvation)

In the target translation by Robert Dankoff, this was translated the following:

All his care was for his “community”,
Their comfort and their salvation.

First we need to see the definition of “ummat” in some dictionaries. The word “ummat” is defined as “a community of people who followed Muhammad sallallahu 'alayhiwasallam and embraced Islam, lived in Medinah. In Collins’ dictionary we can see the definition like “the Muslim community throughout the world.” As we can see translator used the word “community” instead of “ummat.” And he gave too general meaning which can mislead the reader.

This bite is translated by Walter May the following:

“He thought of your pastures, your needs and your cares”.
As we can see, May did not pay attention to this word at all and used the word “you”.

In this case, it would be better to use translation technique namely, borrowing and use the word “ummah” itself and give some explanation as well.

Another example can be seen in the chapter named “ Bey’s reply to Ogdyulmish”. In this chapter we can read about how to earn money in a halal way and give this money as a charity to the poor.

Halal dunya qazg’an chig’ayqa ule,
Kishi elgi tutg’il yanut qil yole (3201)

In order to understand this issue better let us take one more example from the work.

Halal ham haram ardar ersa acha,
Yarag’liqbyarag’sizni bilse secha.(2712)

The translation into Uzbek language done by Q.Karimov translates it in a correct way without losing its meaning:

Halol hamda haromni aniq farqlaydigan bo'lsa,
Uning suqligi unchalik g'olib bo'lmaydi.(2712)[7]

The meaning of these lines is that “If you can know the difference between halal and haram” You can differentiate between good and bad. Before going into the English translations of this, let me tell you what actually halal and haram mean in real Islamic life and religion. Halal is an Arabic word that means “permissible” or “lawful.” In the context of food, halal refers to anything which is not explicitly forbidden. e.g. only meat from halal animals which are slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law are halal. This includes the slaughter man to be a practicing Muslim/a, to master the correct technique of slaughtering, and for a prayer to be recited at the time of slaughter asking God for permission to take the animal's live for human consumption. Haram is an Arabic word that means “forbidden.” In the context of food: haram refers to food that is prohibited under Islamic law, such as pork, forbidden animal, blood and alcohol. Muslims are required to follow Islamic dietary laws and should avoid haram and questionable food items. Robert Dankoff, the world famous turkologist and translator translated these lines the following:

“So that he clearly distinguishes the permitted from the prohibited”[4]

As we can see Dankoff used too general meaning of these words which gives misleading for the reader. He used “permitted” instead of Halal. But permitted cannot give the real Islamic meaning of Halal.

Walter May translated these lines like this:

“One must know the rules, what's allowed, what's denied”[8]

As we can see Walter May changed the word Halal into “what's allowed” and haram into “what's denied”. In both English translations, one cannot find an adequate translation. They wrongly used the word by word method. Instead of this, it would be better if they had used the method of Borrowing in translation.

Borrowing is where words or expressions are taken directly from the source text and carried over into the target language. This technique is often used when there is no target language equivalent, such as food or clothing, and can help to preserve the cultural context of the source text.

There are so many other examples of religious words in the translations of *Kutadgu bilig* which needs to be corrected in order to make the real meaning of this world famous work.

"*Kutadgu Bilig*" does contain Islamic words and references. The work reflects the influence of Islamic culture, values, and terminology. It incorporates Islamic moral and ethical principles, and it often uses Islamic terminology to convey its philosophical and moral messages. This is not surprising, as the author, Yusuf Khas Hajib, was writing in a region and during a time when Islamic culture and civilization had a significant impact on the intellectual and literary landscape. Islamic concepts, such as justice, piety, virtue, and the importance of knowledge, are discussed and emphasized in the text. The work also references Islamic historical figures, scholars, and sources of wisdom, further underscoring its Islamic influence. Overall, "*Kutadgu Bilig*" is a product of its time and place, and it reflects the fusion of Turkic and Islamic cultural elements in its content and language.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this exploration of the Islamic lexicon in *Kutadgu Bilig* contributes to our understanding of the rich tapestry of Turkic cultural and intellectual history. The deliberate infusion of Islamic terminology and concepts into the masterpiece highlights the intricate relationship between religion and culture, underscoring the dynamic synthesis of indigenous Turkic values with the universal principles of Islam. This study not only enhances our comprehension of *Kutadgu Bilig* but also adds a layer of depth to our understanding of the broader historical and cultural context in which this Turkic masterpiece emerged.

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